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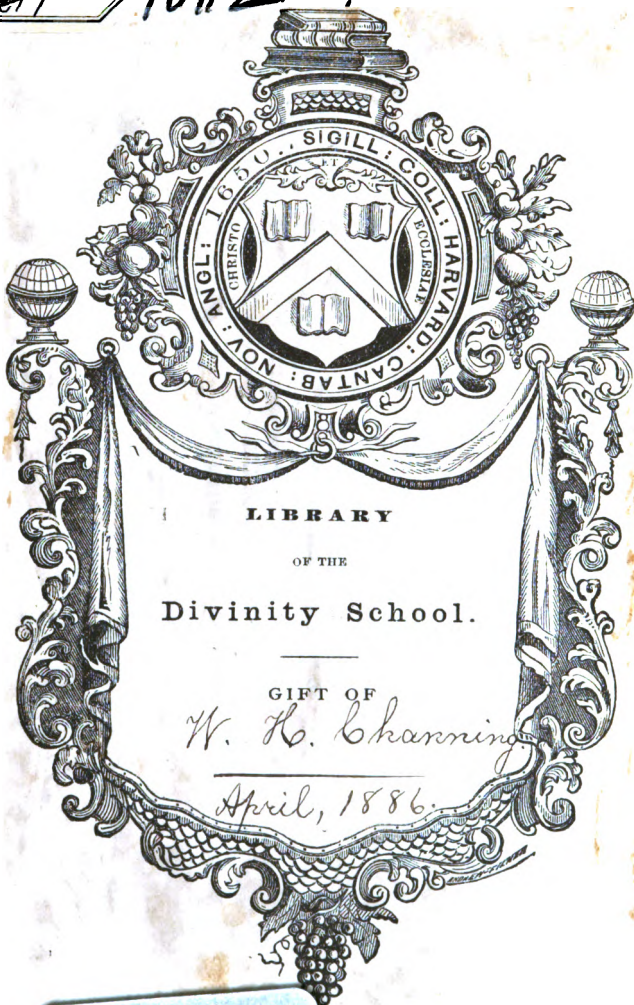
A FEW FALLACIES
OF THE FAITH

S . C . F .

Philos—

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H. H. Cunningham.

A FEW
FALLACIES OF THE FAITH,

BRIEFLY AND RESPECTFULLY INDICATED IN
FIVE SUGGESTIVE LETTERS.

WITH A POSTSCRIPT.

BY S. C. FREEMAN.

"Even some *Unitarians* may condemn those of their body who, differing from them in some respects, have not as yet got, but may hereafter get, some other name."—*Dr. Priestley on Free Inquiry*.

"The spirit of the *Brahmin* lives in Christendom."—*Archbishop Whateley*.

C,
LONDON:
CHARLES FOX, 67, PATERNOSTER ROW:
AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1855:

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TO
MY WIFE,
MY SISTER, MY SISTER-IN-LAW,
AND SEVERAL OTHER SYMPATHISING FRIENDS,
THESE
FIVE LETTERS ON MORALS, RELIGION, ETC.
(WRITTEN DURING 1851-2-3-4-5,
WITH MANY OTHERS)
ARE
CORDIALLY INSCRIBED.

READER,—Should you care to ask—What is the sense or use of a man's letters to his friends, upon his faith and feelings in religion being thus printed and published?—answer to yourself, that he gives you thereby a chance of setting him right where he is wrong, and may, perchance, help you at the same time to rid yourself of unknown error. And, if you love *truth*, and such FAITH as is based on truth, this will be no worthless opportunity of service for both reader and writer. The contents have done such good in private. Why not in public? And, if the writer do thee wrong, forgive him this wrong, as you and he hope to be forgiven.

8, *Grove-terrace, Kentish Town.*

MIDSUMMER, 1855.

November 21st, 1855.

N.B.—A delay in going to press, caused by professional advice and absence at the sea-side, and in Paris, has enabled me to welcome the second volume of the "*Spirit of the Bible*," by my highly respected fellow-student, Higginson. To that critical product of a singularly honest mind, I would fain call the careful attention of my religious friends; whom I simply warn that, agreeing as I do with much of the complete work, I take strong exception to some points of his argument. I demur considerably to the hypothesis that he has given us THE SPIRIT of the Bible. He seems to me rather to have dissected *the body* of the Bible, upon modern principles.

S. C. F.

FALLACIES OF THE FAITH.

LETTER I.

November, 1851.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

What I shall put upon paper will sufficiently express my actual stir of mind, and may arouse yours likewise, upon subjects which have been, for longer or shorter periods, the trials of our hearts' most holy affections, and which, in all probability, will continue so while life and sense are ours.

I do not pretend to give, in so small a compass, anything like a disquisition or an exposition of the several topics mooted. Regard the contents rather as akin to those pages of "Promiscuous Questions" in well-known books of arithmetic, whereof two or three may be worked out into nearly full development as examples, a few presented in skeleton form, and the major part remain for your own wits to exercise themselves withal, as freely and fully as they may.

At the same time, those of you who know me best will not need to be assured that, upon all or any of the questions or suggestions introduced in this desultory style, I have thought both gladly and sadly, and am

ready and happy to enlarge, as far as my perceptions reach, in public discourse or private conference. I would courteously but absolutely remind you of one condition which I make in case of personal conference in such matters, viz., that you or others agree to meet me as fellow-seekers of truth and progress, in singleness of heart and hope, and not as sticklers for any *ism* or *dogma* or "foregone conclusion." You will assure me that you are willing, with myself, to rid yourselves of wrong, and rest again and again in right, whenever you feel or ferret out the one—wherever you frame or find the other. Safe in this assurance, I offer no fulsome apology—no deprecation of censure—for whatever may by literary formalists be termed "*crude*" or nakedly suggestive; inasmuch as I do not proffer here anything more than, as it were, a sample of the raw materials out of which much of "meat, clothes, and fire," for the mind and heart, may haply be produced. If you and I, through a friendly and fearless comparison of ideas on such subjects as are here sketched, can but forward each other's love and quest of truth in matters of doubt or of doctrine, my self-convicted committal to press will not have tried you and me in vain. If we shall have purely convinced ourselves that our *will* to do good service for truth and mankind is far from being equalled by our *deed*—that we are incompetent or unsuccessful in our aims at posts of active honour—let us take comfort enough in thinking, "those also serve who only stand and wait."

It has become almost a void as well as a vulgar truism, to say that our times are broadly characterised by a SCEPTICAL SPIRIT—a sort of intellectual *grin* of doubt on

matters of the gravest moment. In effect, the spirit of doubt develops itself in so curious a form of mingled credulity and incredulity, that one scarcely knows sometimes whether to stand aghast in serious horror of soul, or to be "all agog" with diversion.

It is as though Janus had become twin-made of Democritus and Heraclitus pericranially compounded, and Diogenes had lent the creature his tongue and his tub, or were agreed to become this novel Janus's own genius. My friends, this, or something very like this, appears to me to be the spirit of mid-century nineteenth, especially as it regards education, religion, and "the Life that now is;" and not altogether irrespectively, alas! of the obnoxious verities of "that which is to come." Fast, very fast, I apprehend, "the spiritual" of human SOUL is giving place to "the secular" of human SOCIETY; and that, too, in circles which still claim specially to be religious, exemplary in doctrine, bent on making their "calling and election sure," as churches, as christians, as children of God! Observation and experience compel me to believe that the class just signified is very large and swelling, and accumulates its adherents from all sects and parties, without exception. Its person and pretensions and family connections will be best comprehended by naming it L. S. D. Legion and Co.; and its many members find their prototypes in the constituent parts and particles of the human body, from the hair on the head down to the little toe of the full-grown assemblage. This fact, in the form and pressure of the time, is so patent, that one born blind could well-nigh see it; for it might almost couch his vision.

That the effectual antidote to this evil must be prescribed of Heaven, in some form or other, who can doubt, but those who prefer a fog of Sunday faith to a sunlight of every-day exposure? Let us all plead guilty, more or less (from varied motives—good, bad, and indifferent), of too often preferring six days' Mammon, alas! to one day's God. Who throws the first stone? Nay, not I, nor any of you. But suppose one of us to throw, and even hit a noted fellow-sinner on his most vulnerable heartstring, would he be sensible of the wound? Or, if conscious of pain, would he ascribe it to flaccid fibre of spirit, or to mere flaw of the flesh? Even if conscience-touched, would he not rather show that

“He whom a fool doth very wisely hit,
Doth very foolishly, e'en though he smart,
Not to seem senseless of the bob?”

Enough has been issued, by both secular and religious pens, to show the moral mistake of gold-digging, whether in the mines of new colonies, or in the marts of the old parent states. But of what avail is the pen against pounds, shillings, and pence? What power have wise words, in the book or the mouth, to check wild works in the bush or the mine? or to countervail, by one day's holy exercise, a week's “profane” exertions in metropolitan markets and provincial returns of goods and gains? What ministration of *pure* love of LIFE for its own dear sake, as one of God's richest loans, and (alas, how often!) one of our wretchedest losses, is traceable in the habit of being “not slothful in business,” unless one be likewise devoutly “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” I would ask this, pointedly, of political

economists, mercantile devotees, monarchical money-lenders, and others, who, in addition to the enormous credit which they enjoy on 'change, have an immeasurable credit for church-piety and religious rectitude, at home and abroad. Methinks our noisy love of PEACE, is peradventure, now and then, another phrase for a nauseous love of PENCE. There is too much counting-house calculation in it, far too much of statistical stut-tering about it, to look bold or sound noble. Oh! while I am, I hope, one of those who hate WAR with a perfect hatred, and regard it as the scourge of humanity, yet do I believe, from my inmost soul, that this age of ours very much needs that or some other *scourge* of its fickleness and folly, and fulsome pretence of homage to "Piety" and "People." I cannot doubt that, in regard to lack of moral marrow and sound pith of conscience, if it pleased the Lord of Hosts to set this and other lands embroiled in war, He would be found, as ever, out of seeming evil still educing good, and better yet, and better thence again, in infinite progression. The good in prospect thence to the body politic, to the popular life, would be a renovated energy of soul for earnest and holy purposes—for means and ends far, far above marts, manufactures, and money-getting—a revival of those soul-heaving aspirations which are now, alas! supplanted by smoke and smallness of aim amongst our "smart young men," who, even if they cannot, or will not, or dare not, believe in a future life of hope or hap, might feel (as they have never yet felt) an intellectual and moral chivalry of spirit, an interest in everlasting right, and against never-ending wrong, a spiritual perception of the facts which *are* "revealed"

around them on earth, and, perhaps, bye and bye, of the FAITH which they should admire, embrace, and revere, as given of Heaven.

War, amidst all its countless and often causeless forms of horror, begets, unmistakeably, a spirit of self-devotion and manful adventure, which is wholesome to the very core of the conscience of man. Would that this same good spirit were called forth by other modes of enterprise, in this our day! EMIGRATION had seemed likely, almost certain, to evoke it; and to some extent has, of course, called up some brave and noble "spirits from the vasty deep" of pseudo-spiritual and cash-fraught civilisation. But will the main motive bear even charitable scrutiny? Admitting many instances of ardent zeal for real and religious good to self and society, can we shut our eyes or our mouths upon the almost innumerable votaries of Mammon? Their wish and work and worth are measured by gold; and gold *only*. Gold was and is their Supreme Good. They know it; they say it; they prove it; they deceive neither us nor themselves about it.

Would to God that the progression of mankind could be secured by peaceable means, and that war were no more! But, for these things to be, and ere these things *can* be, the *love* of RIGHT must be the ruling principle of men. This, once rooted in human souls, will bear, as its native fruit, the *love* of PEACE. But let us not expect to gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles; and we may, how painfully soever, confess that, only in proportion as men love RIGHT—right physical, right intellectual, right moral, and right spiritual—can there be peace or the love of peace; and that, therefore, until

men radically love to learn, and learn to love, RIGHT, for its own sake (as only it can be truly learned and loved), and not for self-aggrandisement (which is a contradiction in terms), there must be WARS of some sort—there must be imperfect peace—there cannot be really “Peace on earth, goodwill towards men.” It is vain to argue that by love of peace men are best brought to love of right. Remember, peace is, in its essential nature, one form of right; and so, while right fails of one of its constituents, it is not matured. Conversely, however, peace may be prevalent without right and *against* right. You may “make a solitude and call it peace.” We cannot transmute our past proposition, and say that, as peace is an essential part of right, so right is an essential part of peace between man and man, people and people. “*Fiat justitia, ruat cælum*” says the old Latin adage. Let love of peace give place to love of right, when (as often happens in human history) the one must, at the expense of the other, occupy the throne of human impulse. When the Inspired Prince of Peace and his chosen messengers of the Gospel of Peace would *not fight* under any sort of provocation, of what problem do we see the solution, but this, viz., that, even with the utmost “love of peace on earth and goodwill towards men,” still right and the love of right must, at all risks, ever be paramount above all horror of bloodshed and hatred of war? It is vain to reply nay, but they would and did give their right to life, their right to “*right*,” their very right of rights, sooner than be breakers of *peace*, and therefore prove that love of peace is above love of right. Look at the facts—recal their principles of action. “If it be *right*

in the sight of God to obey man rather than God, judge ye." What does this, taken with their conduct as its glossary, fully mean? Why, this:—We love PEACE much—very much—but we love RIGHT more; and, accordingly, we defy your worst powers, and we lend ourselves as your victims, though the consequence be shedding of blood, and exercise of the vilest passions of hostility in you, rather than, *for the sake of PEACE*, yield one iota of our devotion to RIGHT. There is often, my dear friends, a horribly dissonant hollowness in a present "love of peace," where one cannot hear a note vibrate to the voice of eternal RIGHT. Heaven forefend, now and always, that old England be involved in Continental warfare—or any warfare—if, at least, right can do and be without it. But if, with continued peace, we cannot maintain consistent right, whether at home or abroad, by the hearth, the highway, or the altar, pray let us have no mandlin about PEACE—then only another word for poltroonery and patch—but let nature, judgment, and conscience, unitedly have their wholesome and seasonable sway, and let RIGHT be upheld at the risk of peace, else noisy peace may explode speechless right.

I do not stay here to enter into the much vexed question of Jesus Christ and his apostles being patterns of PEACE to all men, at least to all who profess to learn of them, because I am persuaded that they neither are nor ever were intended to be exemplars of abstinence from WAR, except in so far as *faith* in religion is concerned. They wisely left all question and conduct of mere physical defence free for the dictates of the same nature as that which instigates us to take care of life

and health, wife and children, self and society. But that they and their principles of faith entirely forbid all *propagation* or support of RELIGION by any kind or degree of physical force whatsoever, *this* I do most gladly and firmly believe.

In religion, perhaps even more than in any other human interest, is this professed love of peace as a "principle" to be noted and doubted. To it the love of right is obliged to bow very low, under the instruction of that gentleman usher of the black rod known generally as "LIBERALITY," or freedom of faith.

But fable, ever full of instruction, tells us that even the demon of darkest doom, when he most wishes to deceive, assumes the garb of an angel of light. Take the hint the fable offers. Beware of this interestingly pretentious guide of head and heart—this "*liberality*" so called. Of genuine liberality never beware; it is man's best social friend. Only be well assured of its genuineness. It dwells only with those *active* thinkers of our race who, labouring, pray to lead man onward always, only and altogether, by the free and full exercise of one's own soul. That spirit which promises peace and progress, with indolence and indifference, is delusive and retrograde. And such, despite its flattering pretensions, is the vagrant spirit which, in this our day, assumes the name of "*liberality*." Basking in the sunshine in which the few real friends of progress do the work of mental slaves, it ever and anon refreshes itself in a shade of words which, as being above its own head, it dreams to be its own high thought, but which is in effect only the shelter under others' culture, beneath which it languishes and ruins health of soul.

Nevertheless, we find with us now, as in all human history, that the welcomed *sham* of grace or power, how gilt or gaunt so ever it be, is but homage done to real worth and wisdom. And so, in the fulsome, meretricious liberality of this our day, there is indication of that truly noble quality at work whose name it takes, whose character it idly, impudently apes. This *is*, thank God! a liberal day, indeed; especially as compared with 300, or even 30 years ago.

S. C. F.

LETTER II.

April, 1852.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

Amidst the toil and turmoil of the time, likely well-nigh to starve or suffocate spiritual heart-life, let us watch the workings of manly thought and moral meaning.

Our age, we may emphatically say, needs and seeks the means of mutual and general progressive human power. Ours is not perhaps so much a dogmatic, or philosophical or logical, as it is an impulsive, "wide-awake," and—to coin a term for the nonce—a *zetic* stage of social development. This may be termed the generation of "Notes and Queries;" especially in the moral and secular appliances of knowledge or of research. It frequently, however, reminds one of the significant adage, that "any fool may ask questions which the wisest man cannot answer." Sooth to say, our eager querists hardly wait or seem to wish for answers. The rage of the hour is, to "*question*." Nevertheless, as search and question ever arise from a sense, how ill-defined soever it may be, of want, so the *desideratum* of our time is, to effect a moral regeneration of social life. Hence many queries.

Will belief in CHRISTIANITY do this? Belief in God? Before we reply, we must interrogate too. We must most discriminately ask, *What* God? *Which* Christianity? Of Calvin? Socinus? Luther? Wickliffe? John Knox? George Fox? Priestly? Wesley? Pope? Channing? Henry the Eighth? The Inquisition? The Presbytery? Parliament? Free inquiry? The Bible? The Old Testament? The New Testament? Theology? Piety? Active moral energy? Passive spiritual reverie? Sectarian conflict? Unity and union of human souls? Or what?

It were vain now-a-days to say, this matters not; inasmuch as they are all to the same *intent*. Be it so; and this allegation, if it prove anything, proves too much; for Catholicism, Protestantism, Nonconformity, Heterodoxy, Judaism, Mahometanism, &c., &c., are, when liberally reviewed, seen to be all "to the same *intent*," viz., to sympathize with, and to call forth, the *religious* wants and energies of mankind in various conditions of time, place, tribe, &c.

Whether so expressed or not, does not the same essential spirit inform each and all of these systems, as the underlying *element* of their religious power—namely, devotion to heaven, duty to earth? Prayer to immortals, with practice towards fellow-mortals?

Men of wondrous talent, zeal, and influence, have from time to time been led to take their stand upon this TWO-FOLD principle, and have embodied it in various forms of faith; some more, some less attractive; some almost, some quite repulsive. Not to heap up instances, let us glance at Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mahomet, Crusaders—Christians of million castes—besides countless other faith-founders.

Calvin developed, created, HIS scheme or system of God and man. Luther begot *his* plan of devotion and duty. Mahomet framed *his*; and so with other local or catholic leaders of our kind. Calvin, Luther, Mahomet—and if there be any other like reformer of testamentary faith—took THE BIBLE and their own books, and brains, and concocted each for himself, and mainly by himself, an independent system of devotion and duty. Calvin's Institutes are but Calvin's *Koran*. Luther's volumes are but Luther's Alcoran. Mahomet's Alcoran is but Mahomet's *Institutes*. Anyone's "Body of Divinity," Everybody's "Book of Common Prayer," is his ALCORAN by whatever title or term it be known or called. He makes up, or takes up ready-made, his mode of faith in *it*.

Even those many estimable persons who disclaim super-additions to *The* "sacred volume," use that very book as if IT were their staff of spiritual life, and not as if they tasted and digested the PRINCIPLES, of which it is but the frail vehicle, for pabulum to their souls—extraneous to the BOOK, and imperishable even though the *Book* were lost and gone for ever.

Now, what are these imperishable *principles* of religious truth? *Not* what are sternly, and sacredly, and lovingly believed by Christendom in general and by England in particular, under the name of "EVIDENCES" concerning the times, and events, and words of Moses, Jesus, Paul, &c., how excellent and sublime soever these may be. *Not* prophecy, *not* temples, *not* miracles, *not* churches, *not* even Messiahips; nay, nor even resurrections from the dead—truthful and heaven-wrought as any or all of these may be. Yet these are *not* THE PRINCIPLES of everlasting religious truth.

But rather this, or these, viz.: 1. That Heaven teaches and must be obeyed. 2. That Earth must be the arena for learning and acting; wherein man must help himself and his fellow man accordingly. These are THE PRINCIPLES of any and every religion amongst mankind. All beyond these are the collateral, illustrative, accessory, supplemental, confirmatory, often desirable, sometimes indispensable *auxiliaries* in the establishment of the principles of religion amongst mankind. And it is for "the spirit in man" to decide which fashion of faith is most worthy of God to give and man to receive.

MIRACLES are not indispensable to even the special messengers or chosen exemplars in the mighty plan of Providence. Adam, Abel, Seth, wrought not any miracles, though they were all signal teachers of men. NOAH is not said to have had miraculous powers; yet he was equally unprecedented as a man of God. ABRAHAM has no miracles recorded of him; and yet he was the father of the faithful and the friend of God. And not to cite other cases of striking exemplification, it is too much overlooked that John the Baptist "performed no miracles," not even upon, or for, or with, or under Jesus Christ; and yet John was the herald of the Saviour, counted of all the people for a prophet of God, and a prominent votary of divine truth. Nevertheless, he impressively showed forth the two grand eternal principles, of devotion to God and duty to man. And these very same principles of religious truth and moral obligation were the perennial source and soul of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. But when the GODHEAD'S IMAGE portrayed these, he dipped his breath in ether, and with glow of Heaven's own glory, mingled light

and love; brought in relief upon his pictured thoughts, which thus were wreathed in heavenly group on earth, those self-same *primal truths* of human soul, held forth too oft as hateful, hard, and cold: He named them *Love* to God, and *LOVE* to *man*. And, while there be that are called Gods, as there are Gods many and Lords many, the God of Jesus is the God of Love; nay, the Gospel, as the climax of description, having taught that its God is a SPIRIT, that its God is the FATHER, says also of this Father of Spirits, that "GOD IS LOVE." And its holy, heart-thrilling appeal to the children of men is, to become "sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty," through that *faith* which "worketh by LOVE," and which "without *works* is dead."

That Paul himself had begun to think *miracles* of quite subservient worth, I more than suspect from the tone and tenor of that famous passage (1 Cor. xiii., 8—13) wherein he argues that "when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away;" and he proceeds to specify the testamentary residue thus: "Now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity;" i.e., *love* is greater than hope, and even than faith. And these are the threefold cord that abideth when all that is of auxiliary and transitory import has been done away.

Hence, to devoutly contemplative minds arises a reflection which demands an unaffected satisfaction from Christendom—whether these obvious *principles* have not, if ever observed at all as such, wofully and deeply sunk into oblivion among Christians?

Through the gospel we see, in highly significant terms, the aforesaid principles of truth—common in

elemental form to all dispensations of religion, peculiar in beauty and entireness of development to the religion of Jesus Christ, viz., devotion to the immortal, duty to the mortal; both resolved into LOVE: love to God, and love to man. Now, this love knows no bounds at all. Whether held up for adoption in bloodstained hands of Calvin, or hugged to the blissful heart of Channing, or otherwise and elsewhere cherished, it means a boundless capability of redemption for human kind, without distinction of race, tract, or colour. But hitherto, conditions—creed-born, sect-nursed, and unstamped of Heaven—have been forged and forced upon others by those who step forth as arbiters of Evangelism.

And here it may be opportune to comment upon certain tenets or terms known as “zeal for the truth,” “search after truth,” “love of the truth,” &c. Now, no question is to be raised upon the intrinsic value—the incalculable importance—of the truth, or of TRUTH upon any subjects, especially those of morals, of religion, of personal and social obligation. But, unfortunately, we human beings have so diverse notions of truth and of what constitutes *the* truth in moral and and spiritual matters, that the zeal, the search, and the love have many a dubious ingredient in their composition. The varieties of view have at any rate this recommendation, that one party may, without self-denial, indulge in the courtesy of pronouncing another quite welcome to what is *alternately deemed* TRUTH, inasmuch as this is not only not sought, but thoroughly hated by the mutual opponents. Nor can impartial observation avoid the doubt whether TRUTH, so-called, must

not be regarded as an unsound apology, and unsafe cause for MORAL research—how safe and sound soever it may be for *intellectual* application in all common acts of life—until mankind become somewhat approximated in agreement upon the radical constituents of moral truth.

Without pretension to the character of a prophet, one might predicate that these will, sooner or later, be recognised and identified in the higher and holier principles of divine and human love. Wherefore, it will be perceived, that what militates against God's love to us, and our love to God, on the one hand, or against the mutual love of mankind on the other, is alien from the very spirit of truth, and cannot be truth nor help truth, much less produce the true love of truth.

Christendom has rung the changes on "the first and great commandment, and the second which is like unto it," until it has completely and continuously mistaken a peal of heaven-sent words for a point of necessary human work. And, in the case of the Christian world, one is prompted to use conversely that saying, "that habitual speakers of untruth tell lies till they believe them true; for here, alas! we find habitual speakers of sublimely truthful axioms telling these truths until—to judge by their inconsistent acts—the very truth of truths doth seem to them a lie. Else, wherefore has many-centuried Christendom never yet been found old and wise enough, with a bold, a brotherly, and a beautiful consent, to say, "Whatever else, under the name of truth, we retain or resign, let us begin, pursue, and close our quest of truth in the spirit of that 'charity which is the bond of perfectness?'" Nay, rather let us

rest assured that, as we cannot have LOVE worthy of the name without truth, so also, and far more so, we cannot have the truth of that God who *is* LOVE, without loving one another, even as He loves us, with a pure heart fervently. We may well believe love capable of abiding where there is *not* truth on the one side or the other, for even so is it often in the God of truth and love towards us; and so, in minor degree, may it be in some of us towards each other. But surely we cannot believe that moral truth can be found abiding where love is not. Lack of love is loss of truth. Void of mutual love, moral truth pines and dies. The spirit of love is the vital breath of moral truth. Love shall be, though truth die. If love die, truth is not. The *true* God is LOVE.

It is surely needless to ingenuous hearts, but may be sorely needed by critical minds, to repeat that the sense of LOVE, as here intended, is the spirit of universal goodwill towards and amongst mankind. Can it be better denoted than by the grand social rule, "Do unto others as ye would that others, in like circumstances, should do unto you?" Let this finely controlling sentiment take precedence of the much vaunted but little verified "love of truth," and we may, without presumption, foretell that the truth of love will be progressively developed. In effect, is not the very phrase, "*love of truth*," in itself, an eloquent proof that truth needs love as its life?

Assuredly, we are much instigated, alike by scientific and by evangelic wisdom of counsel, to seek and know and hold fast "the truth." But, whatever else may form part and parcel of THE *truth* meant by the

writers and speakers of such counsel, is it not obvious, beyond all decent contradiction, that that spirit of "*perfect love*" which "*casteth out fear*," was and is an essential, nay, even the primary, constituent of that very truth which we are to "*know*," and which shall "*make us free*;" that, in short, we cannot be FREE, cannot KNOW this very truth, without LOVE towards both man and God? Yea, doth not the Gospel hold forth *this* as the prior motive of the twain—showing us to be so constituted, in fact, that, even as we find in the education and development of childhood every day—conceived love must be antecedent to received truth; and, therefore, truth consequent on love?

It were beside the immediate purpose and beyond the simple scope of these letters, to cite the numerous portions of the New Testament which support this idea. Neither is it at all desirable, nor consistent with the spirit of inquiry here advocated, to indulge textual tastes and canonical conflicts. *Texts* have been the bane of truth, the burial of love. Incidental references and brief citations are, or ought to be, suggestive enough.

Far too commonly has it been asserted or assumed, throughout Christendom, that THE BIBLE, particularly the New Testament, is designed to teach us "*miracles*," *as if they were a part of morals*; to explain metaphysically, nay, indeed almost physically, the elemental and necessary nature of God; together with much else of very abstruse and abstract contemplation. Hence the antagonism of those who, convinced that there is a large error here, and determined to bring the moral and the spiritual of religion into bold relief, would fain blot

miracles out of the picture of revealed truth, and leave their place as "darkness visible." Now, is there not exaggeration in both views? The MIRACULOUS has been for centuries made so prominent, that it has wellnigh cast the effectively *spiritual* of the Gospel into shades of oblivion. And in this mid-point of the nineteenth century, it seems to be the spreading belief that, here at least, "reverse of wrong is right." Accordingly, it will not suit the "spirit of the age" to remove miracles into their secondary place in the theory of belief; but, forsooth, they must be rejected and obliterated altogether, as if they were no real and proper features on the face of credibility, and were, in short, a mere slide of a theological phantasmagoria.

Waving for the nonce the questions, Which of the Bible miracles are credible? and, Whether all be not incredible? * let us dwell for a while upon the fact that the miracles, all or most, are believed by many persons excellent in ability and character, and to them form a welcome and necessary pillar and ground of belief.

* A miracle is to be regarded *not* as "a thing contrary to the laws of nature." The aggregate of human knowledge is not enough to warrant such an allegation concerning the laws of nature; for of these laws we probably know a *very* small part, and that but darkly. But a miracle is a wonderful occurrence which we cannot explain by any law of nature with which we are acquainted, or by all that we yet know of nature's laws. Its being inexplicable as a phenomenon, does not make it incredible as a fact. Whether it be a known fact, must depend on the evidence of our own or other's attestation, quite apart from all ability to comprehend its *quomodo*.

The question to be mooted here is, whether there lurks not a fallacy in the hypothesis—nay, the thorough persuasion that THE MIRACLES should be held as the original and prolific source of the faith and morals of Christians? *i.e.*, in other words, Whether miracles are so really and certainly as it is usual to regard them, the BASIS of religious faith and spiritual development, even to such persons as do indubitably *receive* the miracles as proofs.

And here I feel myself extremely apprehensive of being misunderstood. Let me, ere I pass on, assure my friends that I *do* believe in the miracles of Lazarus' and Jesus' resurrection, and in several other miracles of both Old Testament and New Testament history, as facts and especial phenomena, wrought by the finger or power of God, in and through Jesus the Christ and other holy men of God. At the same time, this very belief notwithstanding, I am of opinion that, in my own case and that of many thousands besides, the influence of miracles in *originating* faith—in even founding the very faith which I have in *them*—has been seriously misjudged. To understand my meaning, and to test the merits of my question, lend me your attention awhile, that we may consider the actual mode of instruction and influence employed by judicious parents and devout preceptors, to imbue their children's minds with trust and love towards Jesus and his Gospel. In training up the child then, what do we do or attempt? How do we proceed to work? We never dream of insisting *first* upon the miraculous attestation of his mission; we feel, almost instinctively, that this were a preposterous course of

training. We do not *begin* with instilling a spirit of acquiescence in his inspired and miraculous powers. Common sense tells us the child's mind would be only, as it were, shrouded and not shielded by such a tutelage. We feel and know, without staying to argue it out, or even to notice the significant fact, until perforce drawn to observe it—that such parental or educational proceedings would stultify and nullify the means of belief, inasmuch as children's minds are incapable of *so* attaining to the truth of any thing, especially of real religion. We, the parents and teachers, may and do more or less strongly ourselves believe in the miracles both as facts and as foundations of faith. But, though varying in doctrinal data, we are not found committing the anachronism in religious development of giving “strong meat to babes.”

What then do we find ourselves doing for children? What do we feel, by retrospection and recollection, to have been done for us when children? Why, after a few moments' keen and candid reflection, can it be really doubted that we employ *moral* suasion, *emotional* sympathy, force of *spiritual* example—whatever may come under the term *ÆSTHETIC affections*—as the means of early possessing the minds and hearts of the young with attachment to “the truth as it is in Jesus,” or any TRUTH? and that we do not, till a later period of their mental and general growth, introduce subjects so abstruse as miracles, inspiration, and other “proofs of Holy Writ!” And do we not do this partly through self consciousness (little noticed perhaps) of our own process of knowledge and belief, during and after childhood, partly through

well-studied conviction of the wisest modes of educational influence?

Ye, who have been blessed with devout influences from your earliest memory, look back as far as ye can; or again, look around you upon the real young life in religious homes, or any religious training that is conducted with simplicity and sincerity; and you find that long before the young mind can grasp or need the "confirmations strong" of MIRACLE, the young *heart* has been well won to a pure and free love of Jesus and other of God's prophets, and is predetermined in favour of such religion as those holy messengers taught. And how intellectually natural, how morally right, how obviously consonant with the religion of LOVE itself, that the case should be so! But then, it behoves us to contemplate these admitted facts, not merely as mental phenomena, but as fertile grounds of argument and suggestion concerning the right and the real BASIS of *religious belief*. We must fearlessly face the consequences.

Many will think that this demurrer, as to the *early* power of miracles as means of conviction, will do away with the worth and truth of *miracles* at once and altogether. Not so, my dear friends; no more than it would do away with the worth and truth of full-grown "*intuitions*" of faith and conscience—no more than it would supersede the many difficult but needful historic and philosophic supports for the superstructure of variously-built FAITH—supports, which childhood wants not, feels not, cannot use; but which manhood needs, seeks, has, and must have. To the very young

soul, the sweetly awful influence of religious impression is itself delicious *miracle*, when it first hears and thinks and breathes inexplicable ideas of God, duty, aspiration, futurity, &c. ; and "miracle" enough indeed are these strange clouds of thought for that young soul.

S. C. F.

LETTER III.

July, 1853.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

From the position which the argument has now reached, we shall naturally proceed with better preparation to the momentous question of imbuing the minds and hearts of the YOUNG, and of the MASSES, with religious belief and a religious spirit. In short, the general question of *educational* means and modes of faith may be regarded as involved in the suggestion hereby evolved. Further, the vexed question of miracles, as means of faith, must be entertained in its broad, practical application. And in so doing we must, in unmistakeable terms, draw a bold and clear distinction between the propositions following, viz.: 1. *That the working of miracles is necessary to us and others NOW, as means of belief*—which is one sort of question, admitting of opposite answers; and, 2. *That the working of miracles was necessary to mankind 1800 years ago, and becomes consequently a part of our belief, as matter of religious history and spiritual confirmation*—which is another sort of question altogether. Many persons of reflective and devout minds would subscribe to the latter proposition, but deny or doubt, if not discard, the former. And I freely avow that I beg to be

held as one of this class of thinkers. I cannot but rest assured from argument, meditation, and experience, that the "orthodox" habit (supported equally by *Unitarian* imitation in religious instruction) of requiring from men, women, and children, who are to become "Christians," that they *first* and faithfully believe in the *miraculous* attestation of Jesus Christ and other prophets of God, is a fatal, though a devout, error. To myself, viewing it as above stated, it seems plainly preposterous, and at variance too with the usual growth of faith *now-a-days*, at all events, if not in all days of enlightened inquiry. Nay, I cannot resist the opinion that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ himself did not regard miracles, even during his own glorious ministry on earth, as paramount or *indispensable* means of belief in the proper principles of real religion. See his own intimations that He loved to win faith by his *words* more than by his "works:" *i. e.*, He preferred a disciple whose soul felt, to one whose eye stared.

Again, his scornful language about the generation that "*requires* a sign," seems to place "signs" in a secondary, if not lower, class of evidences for the soul and spirit of man. Nevertheless, He did himself use miracle as a legitimate means of faith; and I, for one, continue so to regard miracle: nay, more, I am persuaded that the number vastly increases of those to whom MIRACLE — actual, palpable miracle, wrought before their own eyes — is indispensable. In plain terms, I mean those very persons (and they are many) who will remain nearly void and quite sceptical of spiritual truth, until they (like Thomas of old) see and feel and personally know a present miracle. And to-

wards such persons (among whom there are not a few excellent in temper, knowledge, probity, and personal influence) it is almost a senseless mode of proceeding, to introduce or recommend religious truth by means of a *preliminary* belief in miracles, which were performed eighteen centuries ago. They would be more likely to believe both the principles of the Gospel, and even the Gospel-miracles too, by the which you and I believe those principles to have been confirmed as God's own truth to mankind, if theologians and others would but adopt an opposite course of initiation for the doubtful mind.

Moreover, even if such inquirers be never brought to belief in, or faith by, *miracles*; but if, like Theodore Parker and others, they reverently and cordially embrace the general doctrine, breathe the benign spirit, and exercise the lofty discipline of the New Testament as their own **RULE OF LIFE**, oh, what an invaluable point is then secured for them, for the Truth, for Heaven!

And I most unhesitatingly, though respectfully, submit the hypothesis (I might call it my steadfast opinion, formed upon varied observation), that many thoroughly well-disposed, and clear-headed moderns, who stand forth as believers in and upon *miraculous* bases of belief, have a very vague and variable notion of *their own* grounds of spiritual conviction in particular, and those of Christendom in general.

While I am only too well aware that there are many unquestioning believers who, if once without belief in and by **MIRACLE**, would be disposed incontinently to give up the Bible as a spoiled Book of Faith, and almost useless, I am equally persuaded that there is

a growing "many," quite as devout and studious and wise as those just mentioned, if not more so, who would fain say somewhat to this effect :—" My beloved friends, fellow-seekers of truth, were MIRACLE even proved *fallacy* from first to last—well, never mind ; I feel that my faith had and, thank God, still has, another and a far less disputable, a far more enduring basis than MIRACLE ever was or would be to *me*, even though many or all of the miracles were proved facts."

Who that studies human nature in its religious or other aspects, can doubt that love of the marvellous, a native passion for the incomprehensible and the unaccountable, prevails in some souls, accompanied more or less by a deep sense of reverence and godly fear ; whilst in others there is an equal and even greater depth of devotional awe, attended by far less—sometimes by nearly nothing—of the love of mystery ? And that a "miracle" is a *mystery*, who shall profess or pretend to deny ? But it is not the more incompatible with SCIENCE truly so called, *because* of its being a mystery or a miracle ; for many phenomena, developed and examined by Science itself, are marvellous, mysterious, miraculous. Nay, the staple of scientific investigation is, the marvels, the mysteries, the miracles of Nature ! And, Alexander-like, Science, as she vanquishes the kingdoms of Nature by bold and penetrating assault of inquiry and subjection, sighs for more kingdoms of Marvel, Mystery, and Miracle, to conquer.

Now, I think you will admit that scientific research, though it does not prompt the student to dislike and discard MYSTERY, as some too abruptly deem, yet does

indispose the mind to accept of a mystery as an *evidence*, until intimately satisfied with it as a really sensible phenomenon which cannot be explained away, and which, at the same time, cannot be refused as a known fact. And this remark is of common applicability to the liberal investigation of truth in whatsoever branch of study exercised; and is of special significance in the matters of theology, morals, and religion. The truly scientific mind, I apprehend, objects not to mystery *in se et pro se*; nay, rather loves it, and seeks to make it clear. Smatterers in science and in truth-seeking talk as if all *mystery* were intolerable; unaware or oblivious of the fact, that "mystery" is the very incentive to thought and inquiry on all important subjects. Worst of all their mistakes, they ignore the grand and puzzling fact that the creature man, and the Creator GOD HIMSELF (with deep reverence be it spoken), in the very principle of Life and all its inextricable liabilities, must be, as ever, a miracle of miracles, a mystery of mysteries—an inexplicable but irresistible evidence of difficult truths which, spite of *mystery*, must be believed. Yea; and even when miracles, by their incomprehensibility, scare men so far from their propriety as to make them (so-called) "*atheists*," these very men forget far too often that all the while they are believing most cordially in a *miracle*, a MYSTERY, beyond all written and vexed miracles and mysteries—the mystery of existence in general, and the momentous and majestic miracle of *human LIFE* in particular! Ah, who can unravel, by science or by sense, this everliving MIRACLE! And yet who, with or without science, disbelieves it?

Now, to render this rather discursive comment further available to my argument. Take men, women, and children, as you find them, and adapt your lessons and influences, in mode and degree, to their innumerable and unalterable idiosyncrasies as much as you can. You must not dream of forming them all in one mould or upon one model; nor expect that principles and doctrines, how excellent soever in themselves, will be as cordially or as unhesitatingly or as certainly embraced by all alike. Nor will it be a wise course to strive at recommending the subject through the *head* rather than the *heart* of your pupil. Be the matter what it may, it will be better learned just in proportion as it is better liked. True as this is of ordinary topics of human interest, it is manifold true of religion.

Win attention by touching the sympathies. Work out attractions by teaching "the beauty of holiness" Worry not, weary not, by insisting on the LOGIC of questions whose very essence is LOVE. Even where religion itself may be directly called into question, and you would fain convince a man who doubts of the value, and propriety, and necessity of religion, do not "lay down the law" upon the subject, and require assent to fixed propositions; but by conversational or epistolary agencies of FEELING, sooner than of *judgment*, make him see—don't force him to confess—that he has, and loves, and aids religion, while himself is thinking that it is, to him, a matter of unconcern or sorrow.

It has become a custom, which I cannot but call vulgar, for religionists to declare that something of which they disapprove in religion is *not* religion at all; to denounce all which they deny, as being irreligious, or

at least no part, no proper part, of religion. Well, of *their* own religion it may be no particular; but it may form the chief particulars of the religion of others, who are in all probability quite as pious as they. Nor is religion in itself good; its goodness depends on its moral soundness. It may be baneful!

Let us for a moment reconsider the real meaning of the term RELIGION. Derived from the Latin tongue, and much used by Cicero, as well as other scientific *literati* of ancient Rome, "*religio*" expresses a paramount sense of awe and scruple, especially as it respects Divine Powers. It did not originally imply superstition, on the contrary, Cicero himself places "*superstitio*" in contrast with "*religio*." And it were perhaps better that the contradistinction had been preserved, if it would radically aid the discrimination of true from false religion.

In the English language, however, particularly of modern days, RELIGION means that by which I fast bind (Latin, *religo*) my conscience, that by which human conscience is tied to its tenets, with reference to a supreme, or at any rate, a superior power beyond us; and this, too, whether the religion be superstitious, or sound, or questionable. It matters not, for the influence in question, whether that Sovereign Power be termed God, FATE, LAW, or what not. Every one capable of moral sense (and who but perfect idiots are not so? nay, can we fairly except even them?) inevitably refers his sense of right and wrong to some sort of Disposing Power or Directive Energy above and beyond his own powers and energies. While this reference bears upon his fellow men in their aggregate or social authority, as

derived from their constitution and knowledge, and his own, it bids him bow to the personal cognizance which *they* take of him ; and, so far, it is simply **MORALS**. But there are innumerable cases in which we all know we are bound to obey our own sense of Right, even though the eye of no fellow-mortal take cognizance of us, and because "Law," or the "Fitness of Things," or whatever the grand extraneous influence may be termed, bids us and *binds* us to do so for secret conscience sake, and for very love of Supreme Law ; and these cases, call them by whatever name you will, are instances of *religious* duty. What thus binds is **RELIGION**.

In vain do men deny to themselves or others the possession of the essential elements of religion. While there is emotional sensibility, whether with or without logical and theological power, there is also the religious element, however misdirected, or erratic, or varied it may be. In vain do men determine on being *without* religion. They may be without Christianity, without Mahometanism, without Buddhism, without even Deism ; but nevertheless, they are not without *the religious principle*—certainly not without **RELIGION**. It is an unsafe and unsound allegation that religion is nothing, unless it be practically proved. No man living would really bear to be judged by this *dictum*. To admit it, is to prove too much. It is, to admit in fact, that our religion and conscience are things external to us and cognisable to others. But, without fondly repeating the trite, liberal adage, that "Religion is an affair only between man and his Maker," we may quickly trace the proposition which it suggests to its elementary truth. We feel that our conscience and our religion are really out of the keeping

of our fellow men, and beyond their fair cognizance; yet are ever amenable to the Power (by whatever term it be known) acknowledged as supreme, or at least superior to men. So, the elementary truth is this, that man needs must be, from his very nature, *religiously bound* somewhere and somehow. Unbound from super-human law, man becomes painfully incapable of even self-control. Self-control naturally and necessarily depends on actual submission to *law*, and indeed is "law" itself; and, moreover, springs from a simple sense of unavoidable subjection, wholly or partly, to what may be termed a circumambient atmosphere of **UNIVERSAL LAW**.

Even those persons, therefore, whose caprice or honest preference it is to call themselves "Atheists," may be, and often are, religiously-minded, *godly* persons, despite all their professions and theories to the contrary. Generally speaking, they have conceived some dislike to the term "God"—some also doubtless disliking even the "belief in God"—and so they bind themselves in judgment and conscience, loosely or tightly, just as their idiosyncrasies may dispose them, by a submission to "Destiny"—a subservience to Eternal Law—a subjection to "the Grand Principle of Order"—a subduing of themselves under the dictates of "Nature and *her* laws." But to this and to these they bow, even against their will; of this and of these they stand in awe, more or less, in proportion to their devoutness of temper and spirit; this and these are their Deity or Deities: and, obviously, this awe, this obedience, is their *religion*. It is not that they ignore or despise religion, how much soever they may nauseate *theology*; but they cannot

reconcile the doctrines of this latter with the duties of the former ; and hence they gradually become disposed to drill themselves into the observance of a *morale* which would fain presume or pretend to do without any "religious" sanctions, and, in short, "to be without God in the world." Nor, indeed, is religion necessarily a good ; it may be, and often is now as of old, a great evil, as History proves.

Straightforwardness of manner and purpose is said to be the characteristic of English people ; and it is pre-eminently so, I apprehend, of young Britons. Well-trained conscientiousness, likewise, is a strong feature of English character. These lead to freedom of thought and largeness of heart. And, in turn, such liberty and charity maintain and exalt simplicity and sincerity of personal character. Let me not hesitate, therefore, to make my appeal to our free-thoughted large-hearted young men and others, of all classes, irrespectively of *ism*, sect, church or party.

I would ask—Is it not simply fact and truth, that you do not find places of worship, or halls of religious instruction adapted (with but few happy exceptions) to your mental and spiritual sympathies ? Is it not equally true that you are unconscious of any obvious contempt or distaste, within yourselves, for religion itself ? and that you desire to cultivate devoutness of heart consistently with depth and daring of inquiry ? but that you heartily deprecate such ministrations as savour of dry dictation, or dreary debate, or drifting declamation ? I would most sympathisingly ask—Are not you ready and willing to pay unfeigned deference to TRUTH in both theory and practice, whether this be

termed moral or secular or religious ; provided it be freely given and freely taken ? Do not you, whether as Christians or as liberal men of inquiry, seek and approve principles of belief and of action which shall be compatible with common sense, progressive knowledge, sound science, and the general good ? Do not you painfully regard "The Religious World" as being in an abnormal state, symptomatic of debility if not of dissolution ? Have not you turned heartsick and well-nigh hopeless from *Churches* of whatever creed or caste, and have you not longed for complete emancipation—yea, many of you obtained it—from all sorts and signs of spiritual domination and mental thralldom ? Furthermore, is not your determination to be UNSECTARIAN so entire, that you would shrink from "*membership*" with every communion or congregation which might degenerate into a SECT, were it even so tempting as to recommend itself by the assumption or admission of an "unsectarian" title ? And yet, do not you feel the impulse to social and mutual religious influence so strongly aroused within your souls by the native force of their emotions, instincts, and other normal energies, that you would fain be among the public seekers after truth and trust, religious or secular, if the communication of religious impressions could but be adapted to your inmost yearnings ? And would not such communications be best promoted—such yearnings be best satisfied, if neither fanaticism on the one hand, nor falsehood of profession on the other, if neither partiality nor indiscriminate faith, were infused into expositions, whether of Bible or Nature, Prophets or Philosophers, Orthodoxy or Heterodoxy ? Now, if anything like this be a fair

sketch of your feelings and your views, why do not you regularly assemble for the maintenance and dissemination of spiritual freedom in many places on a broad basis of mental independence and devout research, through the means and influences of a simple love of truth, which is the practical synonym for love to God and love to man? Do not you deem it more than probable that such meetings and ministrations as your minds and hearts desire would be in a fair way to be secured, if "filthy lucre" were at once and altogether kept out of the calculation of those who exercise the function of preachers or teachers? and still more so (for the mere *fingering of wage for work* is comparatively of trivial import), if such functionaries were interdicted from all prerogative, in virtue of such service, that might become or produce an official or professional *sway* over the individual opinion and moral sympathy of any one? Why then should not associations be formed, whose funds, arising from spontaneous and probably small contributions, should not be suffered wholly or mainly to pass into the pockets of any persons on account of their being preachers or teachers of the rest, but be applied (1,) to the payment of rent and rates, improvements of room, and other customary charges, and (2), to the widows and orphans, and other afflicted members who steadily support the association, and whose worldly circumstances may require aid?

My friends, should not our *polemics* in religion rather be against practical evils and sorrows, than about doctrinal contrarieties of opinion? Do not you believe that the soul is better directed to goodness and devotion by the character, acts, and sufferings of an exemplary life,

which represents to us religion realised in human person, than by any or all of those extraneous matters which rouse vacant wonder, morbid fervor, or sheer dogmatism? Is there not a something which the soul tells us thrillingly is of higher, purer, nobler moment than theological exactness of opinion as to the constituent parts, persons, or powers of God—a something infinitely above the most honest pride of reason, namely, *the communion of the spirit of man with the spirit of God.*

Connected with the prayerful spirit of a believer or devout seeker of God, comes the solemn thought of the study of the Bible. And I must not dissemble my conviction that the day is arrived when consistency must be put to the proof by the reverent yet fearless enunciation of whatever *that* may be which studious minds and deeply searching hearts regard as the proper appreciation of book-knowledge and Scripture-teaching in the all-important subject of religious faith and practice. Nothing, perhaps, will better tend to bring about this liberal and loving spirit of consistent belief than such manly but soul-stirring expositions of spiritual freedom as may save THE BIBLE from being treated as an *idol*, either by the devoteeism of its friends, or the iconoclasm of its foes. Very many who are become sceptics and scoffers, have been driven into that wilderness of mind, which is all their own, by the dictatorial requirements of the admired teachers and preachers of Christianity. These have not only disconcerted, but disgusted men and women who otherwise would have been ornaments and pillars to the religion of the heart, and would have magnified the superstructure of genuine piety. This impatience of “the strong in faith” towards those who

are in fact equally strong in the *spirit* of faith, but not so full grown in its letter, lies, as the theological sin of sins, at the door of Protestant as well as Catholic, of heterodox as well as orthodox, of dissenter as well as churchman, of modern as well as ancient Christians. No "party" or sect in Christendom shall be allowed to pass without censure in this matter; nay, not even the liberal and freethinking Unitarians, at least when regarded in their sectarian, ecclesiastical, or congregational attitude. Amongst them are doubtless exemplary individual exceptions. Yet how few! Heterodox Unitarianism has now her test of orthodoxy! Let her look well to the causes and consequences of her stagnation.

Surely Unitarianism is now either mistaking her mission among the "sects," of which she ought not to be one; or else she is true to her task as a "sect," and therefore fails in all nobler purpose as a herald and helper of liberal inquiry in matters pertaining to religion. *Her* rock is that simple doctrine from which she has her name; and on this she stands unshaken and unshakable. But, in so doing, she is only as, the beacon or lighthouse, inanimate: she should rather be as the PILOT of truth, who, ever availing himself wisely of this or any other lamp for his safety, would yet feel that he threw blame on that very illumination if he did only just what that can do without him. He knows and shows that he has to make an onward course (beyond the bold beacon) either into the port of new-found opinion on the one hand, or into the ocean of free and fearless inquiry on the other; or both. Surely more would be brought, and better led, into the full scope of liberal religion by heartfelt influences of

active piety, irrespectively of *theological* doctrines, than by a head-wrought conviction of theistic subtleties being used as a means of RELIGION. In other words, more will become (so-called) "*Unitarians*" by putting the precepts of the Gospel into their gentle force upon the heart, and hence urging it almost insensibly to relinquish all *dogmatical* incumbrances, than by any onslaught, however kindly purposed, upon those theological opinions which only gain factitious importance by the very attacks made upon them. LOVE *first*, FAITH *follows*," is a better axiom than "FAITH by all means; *Charity*, if it can." Oh, my Unitarian friends! be trustful in your own views of the *non-depravity* of the human heart. For RELIGION, trust more to the heart, less to the head. Rely upon it, UNITY, whether of God or of man, of doctrine or of action, of hope or of faith, of will or of result, is best insured by such means.

The Bible, its miracles, its unity of God, its Messiahship of Jesus—these are not the end, but the means; and only among the *secondary* means of the religion of man and of God.

The soul of man, the destiny of the race, is not really nurtured in *a book*. It is a sheer fallacy that "the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants." Had Luther himself actually proceeded upon this theory, he would never have achieved his task. Every genuine reformer in religion, how profoundly soever reverencing the Bible, has acted upon the bolder and wiser principles of the natural freedom of man, and the thorough disenfranchisement of his own soul. He has found impregnable bulwarks for his sentiments and conduct *in the Bible*, doubtless; but these were not the first grounds for his

faith and practice. From the days of Abraham, nay, of Adam, until now, the course of common sense and constant effort has ever been, as it ever must be, NATURE first, SCRIPTURE afterwards. Work, then, with and upon the better part of man's active nature ; leave mental impressions, whether from Bible or from other sources, to take their places spontaneously ; and if truth is consistent, all possible truth will duly follow. Jesus Christ is not best honoured, by even a devout reverence for his *portraiture* as it is sketched by his honest, loving disciples, eighteen centuries ago ; for it is only and barely his portrait which we have in the charming outlines of the four Evangelists ; and it is but a chaste framework for that portrait which we see in the memoirs and letters of his holy Apostles. It is the REAL, not the *written* Christ, whom we are to copy and revere. His REALITY consisted in his godlike perfection of living personal manhood. He lived not in "the Scriptures" (of the Old Testament), majestic as were and are many of the precepts and portraitures which they contain ; but he *himself* was a living epistle of their purport and of God's revelation ; and, being such, he dispensed more and more with the need of their pages to him and "his own." So we, if we would be his disciples indeed, must not live in our Bibles, or in texts and quotations from them ; but show forth the only good purpose for which "the Scriptures" (of the New Testament) were penned and are yet preserved ; namely, to feed *the religious life* within us with a spiritual pabulum which our very souls can so assimilate as to fit us for that "service" only, which is "perfect freedom."

S. C. F.

LETTER IV.

May, 1854.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

You rightly think that the subjects of our mutual meditations are incomplete without a comment upon *worship*. Now, to treat of this or any other of our topics with the fullness and power, as well as freedom, which they admit, would be to write just so many treatises instead of letters. Remember, then, what I declared at the outset, as to my willingness to confer publicly or privately, under specific arrangements, with any sincere inquirers and candid objectors, merely in the way of better explanation, and not for the purpose of polemical prowess.

“ So earnest as you seem for religion and for spiritual agencies amongst mankind, why do not you join in ‘*social worship*,’ as it is termed, at church, or chapel, or other social gathering, met for purposes of religion ? ” In reply, I beg to say, emphatically, that it is *not* because I deem you foolish or frail who do so, provided always that you do it with simplicity and godly sincerity—and without these it would be no less false than foolish and frivolous. Nature first, and Scripture afterwards, furnish me, however, with reasons for my

course in these matters, which are, in my own mind, so overwhelming, that I could not join in your prayers without folly and falsity. But the question or questions at issue here will be reduced to a smaller compass and a much more tangible shape, by forewarning you against needless alarm and painful misapprehension as to what I (and others whom you so affectionately respect) do actually repudiate as religious observance. I do not object to meetings for "religious worship," only let it be conscientious, earnest, consistent, and rather a heart-felt than a head-filtered outpouring of devotion. Now, according to the dictates of that conscience and that common-sense which I have within me, I cannot see or understand at all what right or reason I could possibly have in pretending to pour out publicly for yourselves and others, "before high Heaven," that joy of the heart with which a stranger intermeddleth not, nor that bitterness which the heart only knoweth as its own. Hence it is with, I trust, a pious indignation, that I refuse and reject the impertinence of *any* fellow-mortal presuming to speak forth my soul to God; and if prayers be not the very speech of the soul, or the very aspirations of the heart, from which they are represented to proceed, they are but of those mockeries whereby "men play such strange, fantastic tricks before high Heaven as make the angels weep." Recollect that prayer and praise are essentially distinct, although frequently confounded, generally combined, and sometimes appropriately united. But, for prayer to be genuine, for the *petition* to be sincere, it should be directed, as in the olden time of Jewish story, towards the throne of God, just as "every one knoweth the

plague of *his own heart*." But look at the relative position of the supposed and professing parties to public prayers, especially in the chapels of dissenters; listen to the larger portion of such prayers as are termed "the long prayers of the service," or the extemporaneous devotions of the minister; and lay the facts of such cases to heart. Why, those "long prayers" are almost always so many eloquent *essays*, at best; and serve as stalking-horses on which the mind of the minister parades itself before the strained mental gaze of a dumb congregation; and in which you often have not even the really present feelings of that *one man*, whose lips are worshipping, but whose heart, as well as brain, may be even then quite far from God. And be he ever so competent and consistent in the utterance of *his own* true and present thoughts and affections, how can he dare pretend to utter those of OTHERS, to whose souls he is blind as a bat, or strange as a foe? "Be not deceived; God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" and if a man sow the wind, shall he not reap the whirlwind? Now, the customary method of prayer in "public worship" does verily appear to me a sad sowing of the wind; nor ought any reverend gentleman to be surprised if such ministrations of prayer stir ambitious imitators up to that whirlwind of passion by which Methodists and others have from time to time been distinguished, and by which they certainly fail to "beget a temperance which may give" to the tempest such *smoothness* as polite pulpiteers can usually maintain. At the best, these are oratorical performances in which the actors either "mouth it as some of our players do," or neglect

the instruction, "Be not too tame neither," in the delivery of a solemn essay ; or else, in both these and some other points, "o'erstep the modesty of Nature." Thus they substitute "a custom more honoured in the breach than the observance" of public prayer, for the "special observance" of private communion in spirit with that Father who seeth in secret, and who will reward all true worshippers openly. Not that I impute hypocrisy or want of devotional spirit to those many Christians and other religionists who statedly perform the services of public worship in (so-called) social prayer—very far from it. But I do conscientiously regard such "services" as mistakes in name and nature.

Again, I do not denounce *social* prayer to God as an impossibility in its own nature ; although I denounce the accustomed observance of it in churches and chapels as fulsome and foolish pretence. According to such forms and modes as congregations generally uphold, one person pretends to utter, as the thoughts, and desires, and petitions, of all or of most who are present, certain sentiments which, from the very nature of the case, *at best* can be but the opinions and feelings of the one speaking, and cannot be, except incidentally and accidentally, the thoughts of the hearts of the others who are kneeling, or standing, or presenting themselves in the semblance and attitude of prayer. Nay, it is notorious that frequently the mouth-piece in the pulpit expresses what finds no echo, nay, even creates disgust in the minds and hearts of many of the congregation whose petitions it dares profess to offer unto God. Nevertheless, I freely and fully admit that there may be occasions, of no small moment, when priest and people, having

communicated and compared ideas on matters of special interest, may heartily concur, without fulsomeness or folly, as in days of old, upon the petitions to be uttered and the form of utterance ; and, while the one appointed speaks, the rest may truly say "AMEN." Thus, and so far as this point, well-concocted liturgical modes approve themselves to the sincere mind and heart of a united congregation better in both theory and practice than the gratuitous effusions of a prayerful minister, be his official power and personal character as unquestionable as they may. Yet this is but a case of comparative worth and wisdom. From the nature of sincere prayer (and *insincere* prayer is worse than worthless), it follows, that prayer is valuable and wise just in proportion as it merges from mere lip-service or vain repetition into deep and deeper, often unutterable, incommunicable and unfathomable, sensibilities of the inmost soul. How many of such sensibilities—how much of heartfelt simplicity and godly sincerity—can the fairest stretch of charity admit to be ascribable to the ordinary ministrations of pulpit-prayer? Doubtless they are well-meant proceedings for the purposes of public worship, and produce some good effect on the mind and the heart. But they are often senseless, always formal, generally delusive, as to the cause and capability of sincere prayer. Nor do the organs of liturgical utterance, "parson and clerk," generally diminish the objectionable circumstances of public social worship. The combined aggregate faith, and hope, and charity, of the devoutest congregation can shelter the priest seldom, and the clerk seldomer, the people seldomest of all, from the showers of imputations which common sense and shrewd observation must cast upon the whole proceeding, when

viewed as a professed incense of the *social soul* of man to the listening Majesty of Heaven. At all events, let there be a specific matter of common devotional interest in which the worshippers can really feel a devout sympathy, and let there be a specific manner for expressing this heartily through the lips of a well-chosen ministering member of the congregation ; and then, but not till then, fairly believe that the devotional act is indicative, before God and men, of devout sensibility.

It is the veriest vanity and vexation of spirit to say that, if we had not public prayers in chapels, churches, and meeting-houses, we should probably have no prayers at all. For one, amongst the many who will *not* freely speak out the mind that is in them for themselves, I unhesitatingly say—Rather run the risk, wretched though it be, of having little or no prayer, than incur the far more wretched reality of having apathetic and fictitious *semblances* of “social” piety. But, further, it is a mere begging of the question to suggest that, without “public social prayer” (as it is technically termed), there would be no prayer, or far less than there is with it.

Since the days when the Apostles of Jesus Christ flourished, and the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed, the practical result has never been fairly put to the proof. Under the old dispensation, of course there were times and circumstances, which gave a marked appropriateness to a public social prayer, which was in awful solemnity delivered by one sacredly appointed man, and to which “all the people said *Amen*.” But the customary and consistent mode of temple-prayer is abundantly indicated by the respective and reflective *individual* prayers of the Pharisee and the Publican.

Under the New Testament order of things, let us consent to believe that there were occasional instances of *social* acts of devotion, which were performed by an apostle, and to which the multitude with earnest attention and devout excitement could say Amen and Amen. Yet, the precept, practice, and spirit of the "Master and Lord" were undeniably in favour of the utmost *privacy* for the duteous privilege of prayer. As one form of reply to those who ask, What would become of prayer, and would there be any at all, if there were no public SOCIAL worship? we, on the other side of the question, may very fairly and fitly ask, Would there not be a far greater probability of private individual *sincere* prayer—such prayer as Jesus Christ recommended and practised—if an end were put to ordinary social prayer, as performed in churches, chapels, &c. ?

It may be well questioned, whether the custom and apology of public social worship do not reside in an erroneous, but still well-disposed, sentiment of the religious mind. It consists in the supposition that the Great Hearer of prayer needs to be appeased, satisfied, complimented by men's orations, and that men need be *seen by men* to pray, in order that a habit of communion with God may be strengthened and proved. Persons of devout sympathies, who would thus contend, are at the same time laudably annoyed by the man who proclaims the constancy and fervor of his own habit of prayer. And why? Because devotional instinct, as it were, becoming refined by meditation and faith towards God, feels how congenial *privacy* is to the best purposes and the best practices of prayer; and devotional study confirms the promptings of heavenward

instinct, especially in the record of Him who ever prayed "*apart*" from His disciples. He further counselled the utmost privacy and even secrecy of prayer; and in short, by the disuse of any public or social modes of prayer, placed his inquiring disciples under the necessity of saying to their master, "Teach us *how* to pray, as John (Baptist) also taught his disciples." Had Jesus been in the habit of "ministering" as an organ of "social prayer," such a request from his companions in religious faith and practice would have been quite superfluous—almost ridiculous—and naturally answered by direct reference to a practice which, if existent, would have at once and altogether precluded the request, or prescribed its fitting reply. The grand model of Christian prayer assumes the plural and therefore *social* form; and, in its articles of petition, is beautifully adapted to the tone and temper of heartfelt unity, by which the apostles of the Saviour ought to be and were distinguished. And, wherever disciples of Jesus approve themselves likewise "all of one accord," there may the like social form of petition be apposite. But such accord must be *real*, not suppositious. And, even if it be proved real, there is no reasonable or sufficient ground for its hebdomadal iteration, still less for so many "vain repetitions" of it, as the course of service in churches and congregations too plainly sets forth. And, further, as none who devoutly peruse "The Lord's Prayer" deny or doubt its comprehensiveness for the expression of the desires proper to disciples of Jesus, so those especially who advocate public social prayer must surely perceive how its simplicity of ideas, paucity of phrases, and sincerity of petition, will ever

tend to interdict every complicated length of prayer, all verbosity of incensé to Heaven, and whatever savours of "mere outward show" of the lips and limbs, even though perfumed by the plea of "doing God *service*." So much by way of outline to what might be set down for your open consideration.

Touching the subject of PRAISE to God, and its natural accompaniment *music*, there is evidently less cause to demur and to dispute. So far as public *social* address to the Most High may be involved in psalmody, a similar comment would suffice to what has been advanced above. Briefly this, let all be sincere; and let what is sung in common be felt in common too. Praise is easier than prayer, whether towards man or towards God. The heart can be *socially* moved to sincere PRAISE far more readily and frequently than to sincere prayer, whether in public or in private. Besides, there are numerous hymns and poems of a reliable purport in all congregational collections, which are as free from the objections already stated as one could wish, and yet which breathe piety, charity, and other sublime sentiments, so fervently as to satisfy the warmest wishes of the friends of social worship.

Consequently, I am of opinion that we could have, and ought to have, *social worship*; and, if more than once a week, so much the better. Only, let us not imagine that we "serve" God by it; nay, rather we do mutually serve *ourselves*, and the cause of that RELIGION which is ever essential, not to God, but to man.

And herein, probably, is to be found the root of the error prevailing so long on the subject of prayer, particularly that exercise of it which appears under the

name of *Public Social Worship*. The error involves the very nature and purpose of all prayer, and presents it (under the various terms worship, service, homage, devotion, praise and glory, and so forth) as a compliment to Heaven, a conciliatory offering to the Deity, a suggestive obsequiousness towards Jehovah, a solemn form by which God is *served*, and without which the Judge of the whole earth would feel Himself neglected, robbed of his fees, and so would be likely to shorten His arm of protection and salvation. The error consists also, partly and avowedly, in an ascription of *divinity* to certain orders of men, and in an opinion or imagination of the pious importance of *letting one another see that we do pray*; albeit this evidence of genuine prayer is far enough from being given—even if it were proper—by the customary modes of parrot-echoing from the people on the one hand, or of solitary utterance from “the divine” on the other. Allied with this hypothesis also, is that phraseology which, doubtless with godly intent, but yet with fanatical influence, designates certain places “Houses of Prayer,” “Sacred Edifices,” “Temples of Holy Worship,” &c., &c. Now, all this kind of nomenclature is alien from the spirit and habit of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and from the records by which we learn their wisdom and piety. That there were *oratories*, places where prayer was wont to be made—that there was the Temple, where the Jews used and ought to worship—that there were synagogues, where religious observances were performed during the period of the New Testament history—are facts undeniable. It is also to be admitted that these give a colouring of consistency to the pretext of

solemnly keeping up a practice of the Lord Jesus and his early disciples. But how very flimsy such a pretext is, becomes easily evident to any devoutly disposed inquirer who will collate the incidental notices of such Jewish practices with the influential statements of Jesus's own custom and counsel on the subject of prayer. He *always* prays in the *first* person singular, as we must judge from the specific instances given in Scripture. And though we have cases of his praying aloud *before others*, these very cases, taken up just as they are written down, appear still as individual petitions of *his own*, even when departing from his usual course of privacy for the sake of bystanders; and nowhere is there intimation (even though "the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to *minister*") of his having, directly or indirectly, charged or challenged his "little flock" in any such terms as that common call of modern social worship, "Let *us* pray." He is clearly above all suspicion of any infringement upon the natural and scriptural freedom of private individual prayer.

Of such freedom, of such spiritual birthright, as of all else which marks the simplicity, the godly sincerity, the glorious liberty of the children of God, Jesus Christ was the perfect Exemplar. Let prayer be like *HIS*, simple, free, sincere, and soul-fraught, and I then should be disposed to regard all arguments against modern "social worship" as precluded by the new (or rather the very *old*) custom of prayer which those attributes would necessarily and obviously introduce. None who profess to pray in public would then be in the thralldom of any "minister," who (even against his own better desire) struggles to keep the aspirations of his church in the

leading-strings of his own oratory. Nor *then* could the native growth and warmth of the several members' ideas and feelings be cramped, half-hot half-cold, within the Chinese measure of infantine petition and response. Nor would pomp of outward observance towards man usurp the place of inward piety towards God. Nor, in short, could there then be either such excuses or such opportunities as there now are for devotional insincerity between "lay" and "divine," priest and people. You tell me, "*Man* is still *man*, change customs as ye may." I know it only too well. But for that very reason I urge the decrease of all such customs as give cause for *hypocrisy*, especially where religious faith and practice are to be according to that "service" which, while "reasonable" as well as scriptural, is likewise "perfect freedom." It is worthy of note, that Quakers (and they are among the most pious of Christians) do not deem *social* prayer indispensable to religion. Roman Catholics also, in leaving their temples *open* DAILY, are more consistent with nature and Scripture than Protestants.

And now, my dear friends, let me draw to a close these bare outlines of FAITH and WORSHIP by a very few comments upon a point of inquiry which might suggest volumes of theology. In the course of these sketchy letters I have made free and frequent reference to the Scriptures, and have shown you that I hold them in profound reverence as annals of God's truth. But I am very far from believing that "the Bible, and the Bible *only* is the religion of Protestants." This theological *dictum* I regard as one of the most inveterate fallacies of modern times. It is untrue in fact, and false as a

basis of faith. No sect or set of Protestants whatsoever does make the Bible and *the Bible only* its religion. What is more—I am bold to aver that none can do so, even if it would. From the essential nature of the case, how much soever anybody's religion may be "the Bible," or *in* the Bible, or of the Bible, it must, at the same time, be something else. And not only is it quite impossible, but it is very undesirable that any religion should be "the Bible" only. The pretence of making and keeping it so has for full three centuries been the one grand cause of sectarian controversy and self-contradiction. The end and aim, I believe, generally speaking, to have been pure and pious; but the means I pronounce to have been miserably mistaken. Perhaps the main ingredient in this repeated dose of fallacy has consisted in regarding the Bible as a book exactly and unexceptionably suited for ALL times, places, and circumstances of *Christian* humanity—nay, even of humanity *in se et per se*.

Now, whatever may be the multifarious opinions concerning its inspiration, its miracles, and even its creeds, still, the divinity students of all sects, and many who do not pretend to be "students," but who know what books are, what history is, and also what the Bible and its history especially are, will concur on some such points as as these following. The Bible, as a book, never was put together by any of those whose names occur on it or in it. No portion of it was written for modern Christendom. Those men who are therein recorded as inspired men, certainly had no voice or vote whatever in the selection of the writings which have been agreed upon and kept as the true contents of the Bible. They

wrote under a variety of circumstances, chiefly *present* to themselves or to those for whom, and to whom they wrote. This allegation is especially true of "the *New Testament*;" whereof the contents (except always the *Apocalypse*) are memorials and correspondence respecting persons, occurrences, and liabilities, whose period of history is comprised within one century from the birth of that divinely-commissioned personage whose life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return amongst his Apostles, form the main topic throughout. The four Evangelists are avowedly the reverent and faithful biographers of the Lord Jesus Christ. "The Acts" take up the memoirs where the Evangelists dropped them; and, after a preamble touching the Christ-given authority of the eleven Apostles and the twelfth whom they chose, proceed with consecutive annals of the wondrous courses which were pursued by those twelve great and good men, and by a thirteenth, who, though he called himself "less than the least, &c.," yet was the chiefest of the Apostles, and especially sent to the Gentile world. This Paul, above all others, as from his position might be expected, wrote letters of doctrine, reproof, and instruction, to churches of mingled Jews and Gentiles, and to particular persons. Other Apostles likewise wrote epistles of similar purport; and all the writers appear to have had their eyes fixed on a speedy "end of all things!" All these communications were evidently of local, immediate, temporary, special origin and importance; and it is only in a secondary mode of application that they become useful, or can be deemed valuable, *now*. Doubtless, the noble Apostles, and even the Great Master himself, little imagined that several

centuries after their composition, these letters and memorials would be wrested into the usage of direct and unsparing judgment upon the liberties, limbs, and lives of men—and that, too, not only for this world, but for that which is to come ! Now, we may, in pious trust, use our BIBLES for whatever real means of faith and love towards God and man they have within them, and in a spirit of awe and goodwill we should ever hold them ; but we have no right at all to turn them into TABLES of VERDICTS for cases of religious faith and practice. The Bible itself is brought by ALL sects to the Bar of Reason, whether right or wrong. Authorities utterly unrecognised within the Bible continually decide religious matters without, above, or beyond the Bible ; and so prove, more than I can, that “ the Bible, and the Bible only,” is not the religion of Protestants.

S. C. F.

LETTER V.

March, 1855.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

Why, if I needed additional proofs of the correctness of my view regarding the Bible as the Protestants' religion, here comes, at the very instant, a timely illustration in the report of the sayings and doings (?) of the Houses of Convocation. Obviously, they take neither "the Bible only," nor in effect the "Bible" at all distinctly as their religion, and as "the religion of Protestants." Who cannot see pictured forth in that little ecclesiastical drama that "the Book of Common Prayer" is their religion, is their *Bible*? and that whosoever addeth thereto or taketh therefrom, let him be Anathema Maranatha, is their voiceless verdict?

Now, only follow these divines forward into their clerical practice, or backward into their collegiate preparation, and see if you can find them anywhere or anyhow taught or tending to make "the Bible and the Bible only the religion of Protestants?"

To say nothing of the Rubric and other guides to proper ways of divinity in matters of *practice*, their theory of religion is uniformly more gathered from Paley than from Paul, from Marsh of Peterborough than from

Peter the Martyr, from Lardner than from Luke, from German judicatures of theology and criticism, than from James, and John, and Jesus Christ; from godly commentaries on the Gospel than from the Holy Gospel without note or comment; from the clerical works of men rather than from the clearly read "Word of God."

Be impartial too; cast not your eyes only on the Established Church and *her* "Bible only" prophets. Take freely a similar glance into the Nonconformists' training for duty as "divines;" and who shall deny that names and works, abundantly honourable in their way and place, but fallible as you and I, push the BIBLE into a secondary position for their basis and proof of the religion of Protestants? Rome is only MOTHER-SUE of many Popish, or at least Papized forms of religion; and Protestants in the aggregate are, at best, but half-weaned from that prolific mother's breast; and, not yet men, forsooth, must feed and be fed with, not the strong meat of free thought, but the milk of "babes in Christ." Now, I beg you to acquit me of any envy, hatred, malice, or uncharitableness felt or intended against those learned and admirable commentators or conductors in divinity to whom I have referred. I know too well how inestimable are many of their theological and devotional instructions. Their works almost always repay perusal, and attract reference for religious knowledge, concerning those very deep and high arguments which the Bible conveys. But then I contend that these *supplement* what the Bible lacks, and that in many respects they do so most effectively and extensively; but, in so doing, they serve to show plainly and practically that "the

Bible only is" *not* "the religion of Protestants," nor in fact ought to be so. Nay further, the Bible *ought not* to be so much in *young* people's hands as it is, on *moral* grounds.

Carry on your survey through multi-sect Christendom ; and, in similar sort, though in varying degree, you will find that no sets of Christians and no single Christians *do or can* make out their religion from the Bible *only* ; in other words, none take the Bible and nothing but the Bible as their religion in faith or in practice. None do learn from the Bible "*only*," nor firstly, the existence of God, the duties of truth, health, study, &c. In short, the thing is morally impossible from the very nature of the case. How much soever divines and theologians may theorise and allege to the contrary, it nevertheless remains a continuous historical fact, that Holy Scripture neither does nor can explain itself, nor does nor can form either a first or a final standard of appeal. Catechisms, creeds, and codes on the one hand, Carlyles Channings, and Combes, &c., on the other, give a bias. Invariably, by whatever name it be called, something quite extraneous to the Bible, and somebody's mind *in addition* to the Bible, is devoutly set up as the criterion and crowning point of truth and of error. And so, in my opinion, it ought to be. But this should not be any person or clique of persons, however deeply-read and however wise. It should be judgment and conscience enlightened by thought and study ; but not any *aggregate* of judgments and consciences, by whatever thought and study enlightened. It should be each one's own judgment, each one's own conscience, each one's own inmost perceptions of right and wrong, reflecting upon

the book called "the Bible" the rays of truth which it derives, partly indeed from that book attentively read, but in great part also from sources without which that book (especially the New Testament) would be not merely incomprehensible, but ever liable to *destructive wresting*.

Every year has 365 days, some years have 366. Out of these numbers it may be roundly and securely predicated that in (say) every 300 of the families taken miscellaneously through the United Kingdom, full 300 days per annum witness the Bible a closed and unregarded book. Furthermore, out of the remaining 65 or 66 days on which many Christian families may, in the person of one or two members thereof, probably open the Bible to read in it, there are certainly not more than 52 days (Sundays) per annum, on which the majority of families, boasting of their Christianity too, can pretend to say that the book has *family use*, and this is more at CHURCH than at *home*. When read at home, it is far too much a task-book. Yet, forsooth, "the Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants!" *Credat Jud. &c.*

It is also a vulgar tenet that "Holy Scripture is sufficient" &c. Now, unless Common Prayer-books and catechisms of faith be regarded as being "*Holy Scripture*," their very existence is the stoutest denial of the proposition. Besides, the only conclusive way to make "*the Bible ONLY*" our religion is purely to set the Bible in circulation, and not to have any decree, or debate or dogma about it whatsoever.

Once more, I remind you that such suggestions as I offer here are only the bare outlines of what might be

advanced. Yet I think enough is penned to make you doubt, if not deny, the soundness of that ecclesiastical adage which I am now combating. At the same time, let me beg you not to be blind to the fact that amongst the loudest, and withal the most inconsistent, to join in this celebrated cry, are timid and aristocratic *Unitarians*. In all likelihood, they do so in order to negative the insinuation that they depreciate the *Bible* as the book of faith divine. Many of them doubtless do so purely out of that mutual tendency of echo, common amongst Christians in all denominations, and ascribable to good motives but bad measures. Liberal Christians, whether of Unitarian or other name, are generally quite conscious of the unavailing, though well-meaning, pretences and efforts, whereby the Bible is pressed into a service for which its contents were not originally designed, and are never fitted. They are conscientious too as well as conscious in the matter ; but far from consistent. They need more of the bold spirit and calm confidence of Dr. Priestly, combined with the poetic devotion of Mrs. Barbauld, to make them fearless of what that bugbear "*the Christian World*," may say of them, so long as they know that they are devoutly earnest—even when deemed too forward—in their endeavours to place the claims of religion and the Bible on a just and tenable footing. They can see that, with such expansive means of knowledge, belief, and devotion—such vast and varied sources of RELIGION—as are disseminated throughout Christendom during these later years, though it may have been comparatively true when *first* spoken and written, yet it is positively untrue now, that "the Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants." And

so, my dear friends, your *Bible-only* Christians, where are they? And echo, repeated from church to church, and sect to sect, answers,—“Are they?”

I further contend that, even if we pursued the course of argument above indicated and filled in the picture, of which it is but an outline, with considerable minuteness, we should be tracing only the surface of the great subject which is at issue. The main question lies much deeper, and is involved in far more troublous waters than those which we have smoothly skimmed. Again, I am painfully apprehensive of being misconceived. Be full of Christian charity while I moot my next point of heresy, one which I desire to render very salient amongst my allegations.

We have lived to see, and rejoice in seeing, that divines as well as laity in various sects and parties are sensibly relinquishing the old dogma of “plenary inspiration.” For studious and amiable men of unquestioned talent and research to be found admitting that justice towards man and God must deny that the contents of the Bible are the penned and printed *breath of God*—this indeed is a token and promise of growing truth to men’s trust. If men are specially delegated to the charge of things divine, it is exceeding well when these men freely and faithfully state their verdict on the case tried by them as ever in the fear of God, but never in the fear of man. And yet how very slow the human mind at the best is to see what must by fair consequence, if not by necessary admission, follow from what it has already pronounced right. In one respect, this very slowness is a moral boon; for it checks hasty decisions and harsh verdicts. But in other respects, it is

an embargo upon free inquiry; and still more so upon the faith and practice which must ensue, if free inquiry be not the veriest moral abortion of the soul. For such "native hue of resolution" as freedom of spirit gives, being "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," great excuses are to be found in the patent fact that, even amongst freethinking *Unitarians* and their liberal comrades in inquiry, persons of reputedly strong minds are frequently alarming their adherents by cries of "Hold! hold! enough." Alas! can there ever be enough of fresh discovery and free investigation, fearless of results, while conscience is clear? Is it, then, come to this that Unitarianism has its "orthodoxy?" When will Christians discern that so long as certain classes of men are deputed to guard the "faiths" of the respective churches, there will, there must always be, a propensity in such delegated mortals to exclaim, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further! and here shall thy proud waves be staid." The tendency to this cry will not be always equally strong; in some great minds it will be slight. But the *spirit* of dictation and denial necessarily inheres in those who enjoy a conscious devolution of official authority in all concerns; and, above all others, in those of religious belief and duty. Neither are these directors of the faith slow to impute to the flow of free thought and free speech a *pride* which redounds to their self-conviction.

Nor let any of us who devote our thoughts earnestly to these topics flatter ourselves that by shrewd inuendoes against "reverends," by ascription of pious pretences to "clergy," by derogation from the social dignity of "DIVINES," we do honour and service to pure truth, or

even shelter "our noble selves" from the like imputations. A dictatorial temper may quite as easily (ay, even more insidiously) penetrate the proceedings of an anti-clerical Church as one that (like the established Church for example) has its sacred orders of men—its bishops, its archdeacons, its priests. An association for religious purposes may in its aggregate capacity exercise a clever spiritual despotism, which most if not all of its members would blush and blunder over in their individual persons. There may be even more fetters upon free inquiry without a "CLERGY" than with one; and, which is worse, shrewder shackles upon free and conscientious action. A freethinking CHURCH has, ere now, gagged many a freethinking *man*. It has done worse far; it has consigned him "to Satan" for none other offence than that he has dared to think, speak, and act freely against official tyranny, moral turpitude, doctrinal fallacy, and *Church dogma*.

Now what is the great cause of this kind of spiritual domination, under the guise of care for men's souls and their salvation? Why, evidently and mostly this:—The clerical and the anti-clerical religious powers alike hug themselves in the mantle of assumed *delegation from God*. If they could but humbly regard themselves, and heartily be treated by others, as men of no more authority *from Heaven* than their "lay" fellow-seekers after truth, or than their non-elect fellow-sinners, there might be little harm in their ways. But, once possessed of the delusive idea of "*Divine authority*," represented in their office, or by their ecclesiastical functions—once beyond doubt that their clergy or their anti-clerical Church is "*elect of Heaven*," or an embassy from Heaven—they

readily persuade themselves that when the *divinely-appointed* BODY determines, its members, especially all subordinate members, must and shall conform. And thus we witness the almost incredible facts of professing *Non-conformists* dictatorially insisting upon conformity in faith and practice. Thus, we have to hear of Unitarians and freethinking Christians, amidst many a boast of anti-priestcraft and religious liberty, ever and anon denouncing as a foe to Truth and Christ the free and faithful thinker. Let such a one but cast the shadow of a doubt over the moral wisdom of the religious arithmetic upon which the staunch old UNIT-arian takes his first and last position ; and incontinently he is more than suspected of preference for the Athanasian creed. Let such a one but moot the 'hypothesis that the rationale of spiritual evidence is hitherto unsatisfactory if not unsound in its basis, and very much needs a common-sense revision, consistently with advancing knowledge and expanding thought in the community at large, or rather throughout *Christendom* ; and forsooth the daring intruder is to be thrust away as one who would sap the foundations of Christian faith and Scriptural evidence ! He may, if a rich man, be tolerated ; perhaps, if a good man, piously countenanced ; but, little as Unitarian clergymen and sensitive liberals in religion may like to think it, or to hear it, or to read it, the man is looked askance upon as a maker of theological mischief, if not a messenger of Satan. The *feeling* is, " What business has a man like you to doubt and dive into these matters when WE, whose prerogative it is to watch them, do not see any occasion to call any point into question ? Mind, you have not our sym-

pathy ; let the public know that ! What right have you to change the tide of thought unless we bid the waves ? ”

And yet, again and again, thank God ! the silence to which the virtuous thinker would be condemned, if divinity-fenders had their way, is broken by the humble Galileian murmur which, even through the brawls and broils of polemical theology and dogmatism, is heard to reassure the world—“It does move for all that !” And, as Astrology once gave place to Astronomy, is it not time that Theology should be superseded by THEONOMY ?

Beyond the bold and reverent denial of *plenary* inspiration, many have, with a consistency and devoutness far surpassing their boldness, gone on—while admitted still on all hands to be good Christians—to deny the inspiration of THE BOOK altogether, and confine the inspiration to the *truths* of which it is the record, and to the *men* who were the vehicles of those truths. Those men (say they) were inspired of God with principles of truth, which they gained by direct action of the Divine Mind on their minds. This point being settled—and I for one am inclined to concur in it thus far—a further deduction is made—but to this I demur—which daringly enough assumes that we can indubitably discern in the Record, *which is the inspired truth*, and take it as our own religion ; and that the New Testament records, or at all events the Holy Scriptures, are all-sufficient in themselves to fix the faith of a free man. I am persuaded that many theologians, and many adherents of their several faiths, have a sort of devout hallucination over their minds which makes them plead for, mix and dispense doctrine, as if Jesus Christ or his apostles,

or all the thirteen messengers of Heaven, had insisted upon that particular book, called the "New Testament" being believed, as "before all things necessary." Now there is (let divinity-tutors shrug their shoulders as they may) between believing in a document, and believing in every *proven truth* which that document may contain, a marked and mighty difference. There is, also, a great difference between taking any paper as a "Testament" from any one's own hands or mouth, and taking it as a well-purposed, and an honestly, yet irregularly indited representation, by various *other* hands or mouths, of what that testament was.

And these comments bring me to the salient point of free inquiry to which I have alluded. That hackneyed, honoured, holy phrase, "THE WILL OF GOD;" What is its just import? As a prelude to my remarks on this, let me recall that other phrase, analogous to it, "The *Word* of God." Now, I know not who doubts that this latter took its rise from the old opinion, surely, in course of explosion, that the contents of the Bible were, *verbatim et literatim*, the veritable *written voice* of God. Hence, the identical phrase has continuously been applied to the same book or books, though with a qualified signification. And even those who, with myself and some of yourselves, regard only certain short but sweet portions of the Bible as really God's "word" in human tongue, while the rest are but the wrappings of records to preserve His truth, remain still content to use the title "*Word* of God." Whether we ought to do so, is another question; to which I say No; because it involves an implication of biblical and fanatical error. But, perhaps, this form of phrase is of little conse-

quence, as such, compared with that other, to which I anxiously draw your attention. There is more confusion of ideas, and conflict of observance, attributable to the "*Will*" than to the "*Word*," simply because persons who reject the dogma of verbal inspiration, cling reverently to the doctrine, or principle in religion, of "obedience to the *WILL* of God." Now, unquestionably, this phrase expresses a principle of paramount importance. But precisely in the extent of its importance should be our devout fear lest it be misapplied; and the more frequent must this fear be, the farther any one devotes his mind and heart to a discernment of the principles, and to a desire for the practice, of the religion which is really pillared and grounded on the *Will* of God. Sects that wander widely from each other, and each from what the other thinks to be according to the *Will* of God, alike appeal to the Bible as the *Will* of God, or at least as the register of His revealed *will*. Yet, how very dissonantly is that same *WILL* read by, and (as themselves take it), revealed to, these conflicting and confusing parties!

As it has recently struck my own mind, a great part of this confused conflict is traceable to a very loose and shifting appliance of the emphatic word "*will*." Very often it is used to signify the counsel and moral volition which God has made known to and by men. Quite as often it is made the synonym of "testament;" and is indicative of a compact or covenant signed and sealed of God. We all know that this latter is the technically recognised and theologically stereotyped sense of the term; whence the accepted title "The New Testament," meaning the New *WILL*, or "last Will

and Testament," whereby all former Wills or Testaments are revoked or materially altered, and in main points become null and void. There is also in many devout minds a mixed sort of impression, which at times feels more of the moral, at other times more of the technical, significance which the term "WILL" conveys. Be assured, my dear friends, that we are not holding here a sheer logomachy. Fallacies theological, ecclesiastical, biblical, and spiritual, swarm beneath the misinterpretation or misdirection of this term, and whether the "WILL" be taken in its moral or its legal sense. Justly as well as legally considered, the original import of "Will" might warrant a philologist in saying that there is not the *radical* difference in sense which conventional usage sanctions. Abhorrent as justice often is from *law*, I am convinced that the essential principles of jurisprudence are, by the very terms common in legal phraseology, shown to be based in rectitude and nobleness of sentiment. The very term under scrutiny is a token of this character. Doubtless "*Will*," in its legal signification, was originally expressive of the moral significance due to a deceased person's VOLITION, which even after death must be kindly and sacredly fulfilled.

But, in applying this criticism to the imposing and heart-searching phrase "the *Will* of God," we have to encounter the difficulty, already hinted at, of devout laymen, equally with clerical gentlemen, using it in a mixed meaning. To avoid this needless and useless difficulty, let us fix our attention directly upon its unquestionable adaptation as the equivalent or synonym for "Testament," Covenant, &c.

Now, whatever force of argument may be brought to

uphold its moral or spiritual sense, of Divine direction exercised over the erring nature of man (which I believe to be great, and indispensable to religious character) I take exception freely and thoroughly to its propriety of sense when used as tantamount to "testamentary bequest." It has for so many centuries been habitual amongst Christians to repeat the soul-touching "NEW TESTAMENT," and to respect its contents as themselves the very "Will of God," signed, sealed, and delivered (as it were) by His own most holy hand, that a hint of contradiction to this devoutly-meant theological theory will be sure to be at once denounced by very many good Christians as a sin against the Holy Ghost.

Yet would I ask, respectfully towards faith-seeking man, and most reverently towards the All-Wise God—In what truthful sort or sense can the "New Testament" (to say nothing further now of the Old Testament) be regarded as a WILL at all in any testamentary force of the phrase? *The title* (forgive me, my dear friends, for writing so roundly) *is a pure MISNOMER*; and like many another misnomer, is prolific of mischief to the judgments, consciences, and habits of mankind. From it are generated the hot sectarian disputes about the heritage bequeathed—the claims for salvation—the legal affiliation to our Father in Heaven—the identity of lineage—the doom of the disinherited—the earthly and heavenly "luck" and liberty of the *few* real heirs, &c. Now all these debatable points of technical and legal specification certainly must have their place in any such document, considered as a "Will" written to settle rights of inheritance. And, in my opinion, the orthodox counsel for the appellants are as well justified as the

heterodox advocates for the defendants, while neither party pleads on proper grounds.

I do not forget that there are philological casuists who will tell us that we do not accurately regard the etymon of TESTAMENT, which is expressive of *witness* being borne. Granting this for the sake of freer argument, I ask, how and whereof does the Testament bear witness? Certainly not of God Himself; nor, in a direct manner, of His *Will*. At the most, it bears historical and biblical witness of certain exceedingly devout and despised servants of God, as having themselves in their proper persons borne witness to the truth and will of God. But then it is obvious enough that this "will" to which they bore witness was not a testamentary bequest or written decree of inheritance, but the moral purpose and spiritual direction which the Father in Heaven, through His Son Jesus Christ, His Apostles, and others, expressed to mankind as His holy wish for their souls' good.

Again, it is quite true that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews indulges in a downright effort at illustrating the new dispensation by the similitude of a Testament. But really he does weave such an entangled web of analogy that it is a perfect puzzle to tell who is the testator; and what is testified or attested in the *Will* on which he would fain throw light; and which is, or even where is, the said "Will" or "Testament," to which he by similitude refers. Indisputably it could not be THE "New Testament" which, as books combined in a volume, thousands of worthy people comfortably regard as the identical document on which the Hebrews' letter-writer comments. This well-known book of

Christendom was not then known at all. I have yet to learn what other *volume* or *document* it might be of which the commentator could be elucidating the contents and the intent to the Jews who were addressed by him. Much less can I comprehend how he could be explaining a "WILL" to *you* or to *me*.

Who that will be free to think, faithful to read, and fearless to utter his mind and heart, can doubt that it was *not any documentary production* which was under consideration, but purely that covenant of God with man "written on the fleshly tables of the heart," and introduced to the acceptance of mankind at large by the life and death of Jesus Christ? To pourtray this extraordinary sacrifice on the Cross, the writer to the Hebrews reverently strains metaphorical analogies out of the ordinary Levitical observances under the Mosaic laws. For so doing, let him not by any means be blamed or slighted. Only, let us not be led into theological error and religious misconception by a careless and confusing subjection to semi-judaical, semi-juridical phraseology.

No one need be a lawyer, nor consult a member of the legal profession, nor be deeply learned in technicalities of any kind, to feel thoroughly persuaded that, if Paul (or whoever penned the Epistle to the Hebrews) was reviewing a *written Will*, we have not got that document now, and history does not cite it. We have no evidence that, at the time when that Epistle was composed, any one even had the hardihood to pretend that there existed, either in the handwriting of our Saviour or in that of his Apostles, or in any written form whatsoever, a book or volume, or parchment, or paper, termed "the Last Will of God," or the "New and better Covenant," or

"the New Testament." Not until many years afterwards, did the form of such a thing exist; and then its contents were selected from a much-cherished but very loosely-kept variety of epistolary and biographical documents, and formed by perfectly uninspired heads and hands into a volume to which was prefixed (perhaps by Origen) the title of "The New Testament," and which has been ever since unhesitatingly treated by the clergy of all sects as THE WILL OF GOD! *

Assure yourselves that I do not flatter myself with the idea of having made a new discovery in these particulars. For the sake of the reputed and reverend guardians of God's truth, as well as for my own sake, I would that I had! But, alas, your "divines" know it all only too well. Here and there, one gladly finds an old friend or a new acquaintance speaking out in a manly,

* To those of you who may, perhaps, look for more of the "*erudition*" of these topics in these pages, it may be as well to remark that I purposely omit all that.

Any who wish for it can consult such authorities (and they are many) as are usually considered honourable and *able* in every sense on these questions. But for me or any other writer to quote, and quote, and quote, passages from the learned lore of authors, new and old, is a twofold evil, as is obvious: namely, it is needless matter to those whose studious habits make the originals familiar or easily accessible; and it is useless, or worse than that, to those who regard far less the "*erudition*," which is really a mere appendage to the main subject, and sometimes an incumbrance upon it, and who care rather to know the facts of the philosophy than the philosophy of the facts. These are *The Million*; and for these, not the few, was the Gospel given in its primitive purity, simplicity, and common sense. Erudite theology is one thing, good enough in itself; but vital religion is quite another, and far better.

yet humble and reverent spirit. But for the most part, one is sadly convinced that the clergy of all sects, and the leaders of all churches, prefer to retain just so much veil of mystical authority as they fancy to be a wholesome and comfortable shelter against *too* many rays of heaven's own light. But do they imagine that none others behold them and their ways, because they have buried their heads in the desert sand of technical creed?

Let us, in no irreverent or indifferent spirit, bring under a brief review the contents of the New Testament Scriptures; and, in so doing, let us impartially consider why, or in what portions, they can have properly acquired the noted name they bear. A prefatory observation or two, by the way, will be here in place. How usual it is for authors and preachers, when descanting upon the Christian evidences, to treat Apostles, Evangelists, biographers, and letter-writers—yea, and the Lord Jesus himself—as a set of illiterate, poverty-stricken, ignoble creatures, so far, at least, as their worldly philosophy and circumstances are known. The vulgar idea, upheld by pen and pulpit, is, that they were a fraternity of *fishermen*! Well, let us rehearse the names, and the known, or most probable, conditions of the leading New Testament men—not as matters of moral moment, but rather as marks of correlative liability to error. Matthew was a tax-gatherer; and when invited by Jesus to be an Apostle of the faith, was “sitting at the receipt of custom.” Though most likely he was not at all a “learned” man, or a refined man, yet it has never been shown that his memorials of his master (except in questions of geography) proved him “illiterate;” and on all critical points we never

judge fairly, unless we bear in mind the age and nation of a writer.* Mark was not an apostle, nor (as far as we can tell) a fisherman; but probably a companion of Paul on one of his apostolic journeys; and is clear of all tenable imputation of illiterate mind. Luke, again, was not an apostle, and in all probability was a physician; and tolerably free, I trow, from suspicion of low life or low learning. John was a fisherman, as it seems clear, and "the beloved apostle" of Jesus; and, if we needs must specify reasons for judging of his culture of mind, surely his "Gospel" (*q. d.*, his memoirs of Jesus Christ), and the other parts of Scripture current under his name, would make one ascribe to him rather too much poetry and metaphysics, than too little learning. Peter was an apostle, the special apostle of the Jews, and was a fisherman, certainly remarkable for tenacity of observance, and perhaps as illiterate as he was obstinate; but of this we can but shrewdly guess. James, likewise an apostle, and very likely a brother or cousin of Jesus Christ, would have probably had

* Note well, that the most learned, faithful, and honourable theologians are left pretty much to *conjecture* in such matters, whether they will have it so or not. For, although we need not join a certain school of sceptics in denying that there ever were "Gospels" (or memoirs of Jesus Christ) really written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, yet we must declare that no one knows where the *original* productions are. And so, while ungrammatical phraseology is found in early Greek copies of Matthew, for example, this is no proof of his want of grammar, seeing that it may have been, not the Hebrew author, but his translator or transcriber, who is proved "illiterate," whether Greek or English, bond or free. Alas, how very, *very* little of RELIGION depends on wars of words!

(may we not say ?) the same sort of mental culture as Jesus himself. What that was, we will endeavour to judge presently. Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles ; and, having been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, a learned Jewish doctor, and acquainted with what we term classical poets, would not well bear to be classed with any ignorant or illiterate people.

Then, as to the mental condition and social position of Jesus Christ himself, how commonly is he designated by such phrases as "the poor peasant of Galilee," or "the working carpenter of Nazareth," or "the obscure carpenter's son," and so forth ! Doubtless, no dishonour could possibly have fallen upon him from the circumstances of low birth, poverty, and worldly want of caste ; nor is the question one of very spiritual moment. Yet the biographical comments, scanty indeed, but sufficiently specific, happen to warrant an opinion adverse to the theory commonly received. And the character of the Saviour gains dignity and consistency by being regarded in this other light. One can thus better appreciate his trials, his resignation, his anguish, his faith, and his piety. From the Christ written it is rather difficult to judge fully and fairly of the Christ real. But what do the Memoirs plainly state ? "Who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." Clerical and mystical attempts to explain this away as meaning that he was *spiritually* rich involve the sentence in such a confusion of contradictory senses, that the only clear course is to take the disciple's words as we find them ; and, so doing, doubt no longer that Jesus of Nazareth was born of rather wealthy con-

nections in life. His temptation in the wilderness gains tenfold significance upon this hypothesis; for we then see how he came to entertain such strong inducements to worldly influence and temporal power. How amusing it is to watch the working of words! For "*carpenter*" read "*BUILDER*," which might just as well be the English translation, and what a new English air of "respectability" would surround the calling! The family were so far from being obscure that they were very well known; his father, Joseph "the carpenter" or *builder*, and his brethren too.

What is altogether recorded of him does not betoken want of culture, or of social connection in the higher circles of ordinary life; but quite the contrary. The contemptuous exception taken against him as being a man undeserving of religious or legal consideration in Jewry manifestly arose from his not belonging to the *Levitical order*, not coming forward with *technical* pretensions, not having upon him the official stamp of common *clerical* authority. It is ever the same in the affairs of religion. The cry is, Has he been clerically and technically educated in theology? If not, what can *he* teach or know of religion?

Such would be peculiarly the case among a nation so full of sacerdotal observances, technical authorities, and legal formalities, as the Jews. That one who had not had class-schooling in theology should pretend to rectify *their* religion—oh, this was insufferably monstrous in their eyes! And as with Jews, even so with Gentiles; with Christians, orthodox and heterodox! But, I repeat, the theory of rank and culture is a mere diversion from our main topic, and affects not its issues.

Of this Heaven-gifted man, the paragon of humanity, the express image of divinity, "Jesus Christ, the righteous," we have the *memorabilia* penned by four very different disciples, of whom the last was a fisherman; he and the first were personal intimates of the Lord, and the others little known to us, beyond their biographical position. Immediately following these memoirs, come the annals of his divinely-inspired agents in the larger dissemination of the wondrously-attested faith, which they cherished within the holiest recesses of their united souls. The remarkable epistles, written by some of these holy agents of God and His Christ, form the next portions of the book in question. These were, indubitably, directed, not only to particular churches, and to especial persons, but to subjects and requirements of particular times, places, and circumstances. After all these, comes a mystical production, written probably or possibly by "him whom Jesus loved." These documents constitute the volume entitled "The New Testament;" and are doubtless profitable, in varying degrees, "for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness."—Add also, they were not written in any order of time, corresponding to their order of place in the book which they form. But, from first to last of their contents, where is the shadow of the characteristic of a WILL? Yes, indeed, they are characterized, in the persons and precepts of Jesus and his apostles, by devotion to that great principle of piety towards God—"Thy WILL be done!" But this is incense of gospel-spirit, not intent of law-letter. This whispers of the unwritten spiritual nature of religion in general, and of the religion of Jesus in particular. This principle

silently but eloquently forbids churches, sects, bigots, zealots, to utter or harbour that reiterated Shylock-plea—" *Is it so written in the BOND?* "

CONCLUSION.—A very great step will be taken towards the reinstatement of religious interest and Christian sympathy in the hearts and minds of those millions who have avowedly lost all such interest and sympathy, and of the many millions more who very doubtfully "hold fast that which is good," if theologians—heterodox as well as orthodox—will be fearlessly faithful. They seem to be "ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth" conveyed by the grand spiritual assertion (true in more senses than that in which the apostle Paul made it), that "*the word of God is NOT bound.*" And, whatever may be said of other laws, the subtle laws of *spiritual* proof cannot be stereotyped. Only a few of the reverend guardians of Scripture can endure to be told—still fewer dare to tell others—that the religion of Jesus Christ perishes, unless it be allowed to have a continually enlarging area of development; that it is a fatal fallacy to fence it round with fixed forms of evidence and identity; that, so far is it from being *defenceless* if left *fenceless*, that the latter condition is as essential to its nature—its very life—as to that spirit in man by which and in which the religion itself of Christ Jesus lives and moves, and has its being; that if reference be necessarily made to the contents of books, or of a book, in which the principles, precepts, and practice of that religion are set forth, it is but wise and worthy in those who profess to be "children of the light," to see that such book or books be disencumbered of literary cloaks and ecclesiastical

veils, how kindly and cleverly soever thrown over the same; and that the memoirs and correspondence, the annals and visions concerning Him who was and is "*the way, THE TRUTH, and the life,*" be no less truly than vividly represented in all respects—clear of every sign or risk, if possible, of "*pious fraud.*"

And let not any clergy be surprised at all if they and the Bible be suspected of even "*pious fraud*" in days like ours, when thinkers whom the clergy may blandly term "*illiterate,*" simply re-assert a prerogative ascribed by all clergy to the Carpenter and fishers of Galilee.

Let the working classes (whether secularists, sceptics, or what not) have the Bible, especially the New Testament—offered for what it is, no more, and no less—and the many clear hard heads, and warm honest hearts amongst them may yet take its truths and tokens *as* the free gift of God to mankind.

But, if clerical gentlemen and other professing friends of "*faith*" will persist in demanding consent and conviction on anything like mere dogmatic grounds, irrespective of suitability to the hour, the men, and the common principles of truth and inquiry, then farewell to all just hopes of making the world religious and the churches wise. Oh, why will pious teachers of faith—*Unitarian* as well as others—so often ascribe to ill-will and perverse wit the disinclination of many to take the book for aught else than what it can be made out really to be! Not to dwell upon the Old Testament as a guide for life on earth, but concentrating attention on the New Testament as the reputed "*WILL of God,*" for the settlement of the affairs of the soul here and

hereafter, let the liberal clergy of any church or sect, let free-thinking religionists of every persuasion, be ready to hear humbly what their "*illiterate*" objects of pity have to object on their part to the offer made to them of a book of faith from Heaven. Let us humbly grant patience and pardon to such objectors, while they say plainly that they are unable to see how the cases most conspicuously presented to their observation in that book tally with their own case, or those of most men now-a-days—while they beg to know how it is that, although poverty, tribulation, and extreme self-denial are the specifics for *spiritual illness* prescribed in the New Testament, not only by precept, but by personal instances, the professing pioneers of "the truth as it is in Jesus," now-a-days, take exceedingly great care to avoid, as fully as possible, becoming poor, sorry, or self-oblivious, while yet they can scarcely be pronounced so *spiritually* WELL as not to need those remedies; nay, on the contrary, are uniformly declared, by *their own* verdict, to be miserable sinners, or, as the heterodox would prefer saying, very erring, sons and servants of God and Christ, and much needing the chastisements of Heaven. The fallacy of learned Christians, regarding Scripture language and feeling, lies in a habit of pretending, with an *illiteracy* which they would scornfully expose in the *unclerical*, to make texts and terms which were pointed to especial persons and occurrences in the East, 1,800 years ago, adapt themselves to religious affairs in the West at this hour.

Perused with this fallacious application, the New Testament becomes, of course, a very melancholy volume to persons of sincere hearts and sound heads, who

would fain put themselves under its spiritual influence, if they could find it sensible and wholesome. That it can be so found, I for one cordially affirm, while I, on the other hand, am as strongly assured, by personal experience of my own soul, and by communion with others of varied Christianity, that, in far the majority of cases, the Bible (and the *New Testament* especially) is perverted through clerical fallacies as to its contents, and discarded through the violence which such fallacies do to reason, to conscience, and to a naturally devout spirit. "The letter" is of *human* origin, and, like all the faiths of that stamp, "killeth." But the "spirit" is *DIVINE*, and, like all which has that character, "giveth life" to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness according to the light which is of Heaven shed upon their free and faithful souls.

S. C. F.

POSTSCRIPT—ON BAPTISM.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

ONE of you has justly urged that the claims of an *initiatory rite* ought to be tested, by all means. In reply, I present to you what I delivered ten years ago, and what I reassert specifically now.

Whatever has, or is deemed to have, religious importance in any part of Christendom at least, if not throughout the civilized world, must merit serious consideration—must be of solemn import, must recommend itself to the devout and rational regard of every pious mind. Let the observances connected with religion be never so absurd or self-contradictory, or mischievous in their origin, their professed object, and their obvious tendency, still, if these be entertained *sincerely* as needful tenets of faith and practice, they should surely be treated with the respect due to “godly sincerity,” and with fervent *charity*.

Among the theological subjects which have produced the array of passions and prejudices, and those countless other accompaniments of wordy war, so unhappily common to religious controversy, is the *Doctrine and Rite* of BAPTISM. Let us endeavour to steer clear of the quicksands on which some have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. Let us not suffer ourselves to

be wafted out of our proper course by the strong current of popular opinion on the one hand, or to be absorbed by the vortex of prone self-delusion on the other. To cut short the metaphor, let us find and keep our chart and compass and pilotage in the Holy Scriptures. By the Bible, then—especially by the New Testament—should this and all other matters of religious ordinance be tested in any Church “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus the Messiah himself being the chief corner-stone.”

BAPTISM, being by many modern religionists propounded as a scriptural rite, binding upon believers in *all* times subsequent to the days of John and of Jesus, as an INITIATORY religious duty, thus becomes a primary consideration to all who would rightly discharge their ecclesiastical obligations. For, if it be that indispensable preliminary to Church communion, or that unquestionable token of submission to God and his Messiah, which some contend it is, *then*, before we can be faithful disciples of Jesus, we must be baptized with water.

Under the Old Testament, the Jews had their “baptisms,” or divers kinds of washings; but these were so distinct from our actual subject, that it will be enough to have named them as irrelevant to what is to be discussed. And in the sequel, I shall perhaps have to beg my religious friends to excuse me, if I be constrained, through fear of being tedious, and through desire of rendering any main points prominent on this occasion, to express myself more in the language of suggestive notes than of rounded periods, and of finished discourse. I address myself to believers in the Divine origin of the truths of both Testaments—fellow-disciples of the Mes-

siah Jesus—men and women who found their faith on evidence, and who admit as truth and duty in religion whatever the Lord God reveals and requires. Well, then, to be "*true worshippers*," must we be *baptised with water*, ere we can properly enjoy that communion with God and His Church, which is so graciously, so comprehensively, so freely offered to the joyous though solemn acceptance of mankind? I think decidedly it is *not* necessary or consistent *now* in the case of believers, nor has been so at any time since the apostolic age, the period of miracles. Yet I am as positively convinced that not only the baptism by water, but the extraordinary baptism by "the Holy Ghost," prevailed throughout the churches of God during the days of the apostles. And I derive from the study of the New Testament a further conviction also, that the baptism then administered was practised wholly and solely upon adults and persons of such years as to be quite beyond the period of life that could be called *infantine* or *puerile*. The plea for INFANT BAPTISM rests not at all upon any *scriptural* demonstration—that is plain and sure; but is rather "like the baseless fabric of a vision." Here are my proposition and opinions on this doctrine. Now for my arguments.

The Rite on which we are deciding is not to be found in the Old Testament. And, even if it were so, the ritual of that divine dispensation was superseded by the spiritual worship of Jesus and his apostles. It is in the New Testament, therefore, that our inquiry is to be instituted, and in that only. No believers in the Divine Mission of JESUS—differ as they may on other points—deny that "the baptism of JOHN" was "*from Heaven*."

Let it then be fully conceded that the administration of water-immersion by John THE BAPTIST was a rite obligatory upon every Israelite who would truly serve and faithfully obey the Lord his God. And *this* baptism is over and over again distinctively termed JOHN's baptism. By John BAPTIST himself it is pointedly placed in contrast with that baptism by Jesus which was to follow, and is named specifically as being introductory and inferior to the latter.

Jesus the Messiah himself duly honoured John's baptismal rite as being an institution divinely authorised; but Jesus was not "the Baptist," nor a baptist; at least not "by *water*." Yet Jesus did administer a baptism of his own, superior to John's; namely, "by the Holy Ghost and by fire." And thus, while John THE "Baptist" directed his disciples to Jesus as being THE CHRIST of God, the latter equally did homage to the heavenly commission of the Baptist, by [example and permission, leading his disciples to give public and unquestionable testimony to their approval of JOHN as a *Messenger of God*. This was only consistent and requisite, for the fulfilment of God's own designs, long before predicted by his prophets, in sending that messenger (the Baptist, by *water*) to prepare the way before HIM who, being a JEW, subjected himself to every observance which had God's sanction; but who, under that same holy sanction, did in his own person and mission and death abolish "ORDINANCES" for ever!

Again, judging the case further by the details of Gospel-history, let us not for a moment consider the question of baptismal obligation settled either by the example of Jesus (on which fact so much stress has

been laid) on the one hand ; or by the manifest *Jewish* liabilities of "the Son of Joseph" on the other hand. We must look further, and must admit that the Apostle Peter baptized with water. And this, at the first blush, might indicate an apostolical commission which *we* must follow out in practice, as feeling ourselves bound by *apostolic* institutes. But let due weight be given to the fact that PETER was "the apostle of the *circumcision*;" in other words, of believing *Jews*. Of course it follows both from the evangelical records and from the nature of the two commissions, that *Jews* believing in Jesus as the Christ, likewise believed in John as the Baptist. Indeed *John* was commonly regarded in Israel as one of the prophets of God. Doubtless then, Peter who was a zealous Jew and the divinely appointed apostle of THE JEWS in particular, would urge and observe *John's* baptismal rite amongst converted Jews ; who, *as such*, would honour JOHN's mission by *water-baptism*, and Jesus' mission by doing what HE did as a *sincere Israelite*. Had they, being *Jews*, not done so, they would not have been true to John and Jesus as severally and conjointly prophets to the *Jews*, approved by God. Every well-informed reader of Gospel-history knows perfectly well that "John Baptist," "Jesus Christ," and "Simon Peter" were *Jews*, commissioned to the *Jews*, and acting as *Jews* in both their personal and their official capacities, consistently with God's commands. Beyond controversy, we may maintain that John Baptist had nothing whatever to do with THE GENTILES. So likewise, Jesus the Messiah avows that *he* himself was "not sent, save unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel;" i.e., his commission *while on*

earth was decidedly *not* to the *Gentiles*. And of the Apostle Peter it is explicitly recorded that he (Peter) was the Apostle of the *circumcision*—the Jews. Not that Peter never converted Gentiles; but his “mission” was *not* to the *Gentiles*.

Therefore, what these three eminently great and glorious characters did in the way of RITUAL observance, how important soever it might be to a converted or an inquiring JEW, and how imperative soever as a duty in *such* a case, becomes of interest certainly; but, as certainly, of no *practical* moment to a GENTILE.

Now, my friends, we know full well that *we are* “GENTILES.” We are (in Scriptural language) “of the *uncircumcision*.” Ceremonies and duties obligatory upon members of the *Jewish* commonwealth while it was as yet entire in its civil and religious ordinances, and which, therefore, were required of men in virtue of their *Jewish* responsibilities—remained in force undoubtedly while the people of Israel were the special recipients of God’s commandments, the special objects of HIS prophets’ several missions. But we, *as Gentiles*, must seek the foundation and authority for any ordinance obligatory upon US (as *such* believers) in the proper GENTILE Commission, I have not the hardihood to assert that Peter did not baptize among the *Gentiles*, one or more. But I am bold enough to deny that he had any commission so to do; and we are aware of his tendency to *overdo* RITUAL matters. Of this fact, as well as other facts and arguments in this discourse, I do not quote the convincing *texts* which are ready to my hand, because they must be known to all who take an interest in these sacred subjects; and I am anxious rather to contract than to

dilate the limits of the materials which I have collected.

PAUL was the Apostle of the *uncircumcision*, *i.e.*, of THE GENTILES ; and therefore he is the divinely-appointed Messenger, to whose counsels we should be ready and willing to attend on all subjects of sacred obligation in Church communion or the pre-requisites for such communion, *His doctrine on RITUALS and ceremonies is the proper authority for us.* Paul, again, was a *Jew*, and a strict Jew ; and *as such* submitted (respectfully towards both John Baptist and Jesus Christ) to the rite of water-baptism. But when and where did *Paul*, in virtue of his heavenly commission to the Gentile world, insist upon the necessity, or even the benefit to a "heathen" convert, a "Greek" proselyte, a *Gentile* believer, of *water-baptism* ? To avoid even the appearance of dissembling on this serious question, let us frankly avow that Paul himself *did* baptize *with water* a FEW converts from amongst the Gentiles ; but only a few. And himself rejoices (nay, even says, "I thank God") that he had baptized so few. And in so congratulating himself, subjoins this pointed and most important declaration, namely, "God sent *me* NOT to *baptize*, but to preach the GOSPEL." This language proves plainly that *he* had not a commission to administer the *water-baptism* ; and, further, that "the preaching of the Gospel" (with which he *was* specially commissioned) remained in his judgment and his practice as a matter distinct and complete, apart from any immersion in *water*.

A holy man, of such godlike energy as the apostle Paul, would not, my friends, could not abstain from a

religious rite (*if a duty*) through the impulses of a fit of spleen, or fear of temporal consequences to himself or others. No, no; let the zealous advocates of water-baptism explain away the difficulties of such a historical fact as are Paul's words and conduct in this case with all their talent, learning, and theological acumen (and I give them credit for such powers), still they must simply choose one of the horns of the dilemma in which this view finds them. Whatever may be quoted from Scripture concerning Peter and other holy agents of God, there is no instance on record in which *Paul* recommended a *Gentile* convert (perhaps I may say *any* convert) to be baptized with WATER. Many and fervent are his recommendations on other points; but on this he evidently looked with indifference, as to any religious obligation being involved in it. If a sacred duty, especially if a needful *initiatory rite*, he could not have so (*dis-*) regarded it.

For the sake of argument, we may at once concede that water-baptism is not anywhere *forbidden* by Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles. But the proper question to be answered is, Where is it *enjoined* by *our* (the Gentiles') Apostle? *Nowhere*, either directly or indirectly; nay, more, it is indirectly and directly declared void.

Moreover, no well-instructed student of the Holy Scriptures will deliberately negative this proposition: *viz.*, that to the people, or church of God, at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances—whensoever any *observance* is intended to be binding on members thereof—when any rite is to be enforced and practised as a duty—distinct information is uniformly given as to the *time*,

place, manner, agent, purpose, penalty, &c. Now, I solemnly contend that no such regulation or instruction whatsoever has been given, throughout the apostolic counsels, for *Gentile* converts ; and therefore none for *us* who are such believers in modern times. For, surely, if Paul regarded the baptismal rite as a needless and even dangerous observance *then*, when it could be quite *rightly* fulfilled, if *right* ; much more, therefore, *à fortiori*, must it be a needless, a dangerous, and altogether a beggarly element now.

A remark or two on *textual* authority may be proper and requisite. We are not to be classed amongst those, I hope, who undervalue such grounds of theological satisfaction. At the same time let us not forget that capital rule of Robert Robinson ; I mean, to judge all texts, contexts, and passages of Scripture by a consideration of to whom ?—by whom ?—from whom ?—for what ?—how long ? &c. Without such precaution, Scripture soon becomes self-contradictory. Besides, it is painfully well known, that *insulated* portions of Scripture are as dangerous to stand upon in religious faith as an electrical stool in natural science. We must take the whole scope of divine doctrine ; and in such light as that enables us to enjoy, view any present question of theology.

It does not appear essential to the merits of this subject that we should in this instance decide whether the baptism by the Holy Spirit uniformly accompanied or followed the water-immersion. Some think it did so ; some think it was generally but not always the case. But the *miraculous* baptism, at all events, would be an anachronism, even in theology, for believers at the

present hour. The opinion at which, after a laborious investigation, I have arrived is, that BOTH the baptisms—by *water* and by the *Holy Spirit*—were for the age; *i. e.*, for the period of time between the first public appearance of John the Baptist on the banks of Jordan, and the dissolution of the Temple as God's place of worship, with the abrogation in God's Church of ALL *ritual* observances, when equally Jewish and Gentile believers were freely admissable through faith in Jesus, the Christ.

The Book of Acts, as seems probable, was written about A.D. 63, or 64. The epistles of Paul and of Peter, about the interval from A.D. 52 to A.D. 64. The Temple at Jerusalem was destroyed at about A.D. 70. Hence, I derive these incidental reflections:—that the major part of the lives and the doings of the apostles were while *Judaism* had still the Divine sanction, while the Mosaic obligations and other sacred observances of the Jews, were not yet abolished; when, therefore, any rite or duty remained imperative upon *them as Jews*. We have already striven to understand why "baptism" would be thus obligatory upon any *Jewish* believer in Jesus, as the Messiah of prophecy, the Saviour of men.

And here we might let the matter rest in solemn but cheerful conviction that the burden of "baptism" is not imposed, according to the Holy Scriptures, upon us or any other community of believing Gentiles. But we ought to be well aware that there are not a few who will be unwilling to entertain such a view of the question, and who will not let it be dropped. Perhaps, even amongst ourselves, there may be those who deem this

not the most satisfactory *means* of conclusion ; though their conclusion be in itself the same. They may prefer *textual* discussion, and think all else insufficient without that. Be the facts as they may, and be the aspects of the question itself how different soever, let us think, speak, and act always as having " fervent charity among ourselves." For my own part, I have almost a horror of that bandying of texts, into which so many sincerely pious inquirers allow themselves to be betrayed. And to what does it for the most part lead? The " passages " quoted are often " passages that lead to nothing ;" or, at least, to nothing but mutual recrimination, ridicule, and rancour.

To offer an instance in conclusion : While some antagonists might cite, as triumphant doctrine against me, what is termed *the great Baptismal Commission*, I might go to another text and say, since Paul announces " one Lord, one faith, ONE baptism," and since they then undoubtedly had the two baptisms of *water* and of *the Spirit*, which of these is the significant " one " intended by Paul ? Thus might reciprocal interrogation and rejoinder proceed, *ad infinitum* !

And now, my friends, if immersion of *the body* in the water was but of temporary force even for adults, and of little or no value to even adults of *Gentiles*, where and how can be discerned the efficacy or propriety or consistency of *infant* baptism ? Really *this* is too much for one's love of Scripture, one's reverence for the religious sentiment, one's regard to common sense ! To do more than condemn this superstitious practice would be to trifle with your reason. Charity itself, while prompting us to benevolent readiness of admission that

even pædobaptists are sincere and devout, will not permit us, if it be only for justice' sake, to view such a practice as anything but a well-meant supererogation.

Once for all, my dear friends and fellow believers in the simplicity of the Gospel, I urge you equally as I urge myself, that while conscientiously relinquishing any and every *observance* which is unwarranted by Scripture well-examined, we should be ever ready to accord to others that credit for religious zeal and sincerity which we largely claim for ourselves; a principle of action second only to one other in the estimation of a disciple of JESUS. For, while the first and greatest commandment is "to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and minds and strength," the *second* is like unto it, namely, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

S. C. F.

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ERRATA.

Page. Line.

41, 5, for *fullness* read "*falsest*."

44, 8, for *worshippers*, read "*worshipers*."

46, 4, Dito, Dito.

91, 9, for *admissoble*, read "*admissible*."

91, 16, for *part*, read "*parts*."

For *Priestly*, read "*Priestley*," *passim*.

